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Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 38th Parliament

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Tuesday 1 November 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

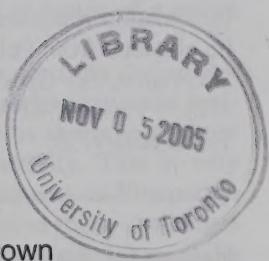
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers



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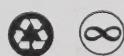
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's interesting that today Bill 197, the budget bill, is before the House. Also today, the Gomery report is questioning Liberal spending, such as Adscam. Recently, Sorbara, Duncan, Dingwall and all Liberals have been in the media. My sister, Catherine Brooks Stephenson, sent me an interesting article, which I would like to put on the record:

"Billions of Reasons for Concern"

"Only those with nothing better to do should waste time on math, but everyone should give this some special "thought."

"The next time a Liberal politician uses the word 'billion' casually, think about whether taxpayers want that politician spending their tax money."

"A billion is a difficult number to comprehend. But one advertising agency did a good job of putting that figure into perspective in one of its releases."

It says, and it's important to listen here:

"A billion seconds ago was 1959."

"A billion minutes ago, Jesus was alive."

"A billion hours ago, it was the Stone Age."

"A billion days ago, no one walked on two feet on earth."

"A billion dollars ago was only eight hours and 20 minutes, at the rate our Liberal government" is spending.

Isn't that something worth thinking about?

I put to you, Mr. Speaker: With all the controversies and the casualness with which this government spends money, this is a worthy article, and I would ask people to contact me to get a copy of it.

CELEBRITY WALK AND BREAKFAST

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): On Wednesday, October 20, it was my pleasure to join with many of my constituents for the Celebrity Walk and Breakfast, held at the Cornwall Civic Complex in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. Sponsored by the Cornwall Standard Freeholder and chaired by its publisher and general manager, Milton

Ellis, this annual event raises money for the Children's Treatment Centre.

This is an important centre that provides aid to children who suffer abuse. The guest speaker at the breakfast, Reverend Dale Lang from Taber, Alberta, spoke movingly about the importance of providing support and compassion to those who have suffered abuse. You may recognize Reverend Lang as the man whose son was gunned down by another youth in the hall of a local high school in an act of violence precipitated by the abuse the young man faced himself.

This message of support did not fall on deaf ears. Indeed, it was well received by the local "celebrities" who donated or raised at least \$100 each to attend, and many went far beyond this. The honorary chair of the event, Sean Adams, raised \$25,600. Other substantial contributions were made by Connie Vardy, Bishop Paul-André Durocher, Mike Despatie, Raymond Shannon and the Survivors of Sexual Abuse group. When the final tally was realized, the treatment centre had raised over \$144,000. That's \$24,000 more than last year.

This is an important local initiative that provides much-needed help to the youth of our riding. I commend everyone who participated and invite my colleagues and the community to join in at next year's Celebrity Walk and Breakfast.

COLLEGES

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This week we mark College Week to celebrate the critically important role that colleges play in our post-secondary education system and our ongoing economic strength and development. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome to Queen's Park the presidents of our 24 colleges, and representatives of the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario.

The challenges our colleges face are truly "seismic," in their words. Rapidly changing technology, the outsourcing of jobs and the looming skills shortage threaten our long-term prosperity and productivity. This is why Ontario's colleges have launched Pathway to Prosperity, a province-wide consultation to examine these challenges and develop new ideas for a comprehensive skills strategy to inform all Premiers before their meeting with Prime Minister Paul Martin later this fall to discuss the competitive skills agenda.

However, when it comes to funding post-secondary education, the McGuinty Liberals are long on multi-year funding announcements but short on detailing the

accountability frameworks on which the funding depends, as well as actual timelines for its release to the colleges. Will those accounting frameworks be like those contained in Bill 8 that led to bed closures and nursing layoffs in our hospitals?

Until the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities can deliver on the question, "Under what conditions, and when?" with respect to college funding, he is only adding to the burden of anxiety and frustration that Ontario's 24 colleges are facing.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Very recently, Australian child care expert Lynne Wannan spoke at the Common Table for Childhood Development and Care in Ontario. Her message: Act now to stop big box child care before it's too late. She said Australia's child care system used to be mostly public, but all that changed in 1991 when they started a child care program just like Ontario's. Today, 70% are commercially owned, and the sector is dominated by large chains. Why? Because Australia failed to ban big box daycares. Australia's largest chain, ABC Learning Centres, made \$80 million in profits last year. Now it wants to expand into Canada.

Lynne Wannan says Australia's road-to-privatization pathway was totally unexpected: "I've come to Canada to say we [in Australia] got it wrong."

During the estimates committee, I asked the Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services about this very issue. I asked her what she was prepared to do to prevent this from happening in Ontario. Would she make a clear, iron-clad commitment and back it up to the fullest to make sure big box daycare is not coming to Ontario? Her answer: She agreed it was a concern, she made all the right noises about stopping big box daycare in Ontario, but when pressed, she would not agree to legislation. In fact, all she would say is that the province signs the cheques, and therefore will not fund them. How naive.

This is the problem, the mistake that Australia made, and we have a chance to learn from their experience. The Australian experience shows good intentions are not good enough. The McGuinty government must act today and ban public funds from being used to expand for-profit daycare in Ontario.

NOUVELLES ÉCOLES À GLENGARRY-PRESCOTT-RUSSELL

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): J'ai une très bonne nouvelle à partager avec vous tous aujourd'hui. En effet, le mois dernier, j'ai participé à l'ouverture officielle de trois nouvelles écoles dans la belle circonscription de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. Quel beau témoignage de confiance du gouvernement McGuinty. Quel important investissement pour l'avenir de notre jeunesse.

Le 4 octobre dernier, c'était l'ouverture de l'École élémentaire catholique de l'Ange-Gardien de North Lancaster; le 18 octobre, l'ouverture de l'École secondaire catholique Le Relais d'Alexandria; et le 28 octobre, j'ai participé à l'ouverture de l'École élémentaire et secondaire publique L'Académie de La Seigneurie à Casselman.

Je tiens à remercier le ministre de l'Éducation, l'honorable Gerard Kennedy. J'aimerais également souligner ma fierté et ma reconnaissance envers tous ceux et celles qui ont travaillé sans relâche afin de garantir et d'offrir à la communauté franco-ontarienne une éducation et une formation accessibles, appropriées et de qualité.

Finalement, je désire souligner ma fierté pour le cheminement que les élèves de ces trois écoles ont déjà accompli, et je les encourage à continuer leur recherche du savoir pour développer davantage le plaisir d'apprendre. Encore une fois, permettez-moi d'exprimer ma fierté et ma reconnaissance pour ces trois nouvelles écoles francophones chez nous.

1340

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Today marks the anniversary of one of more than 50 Liberal broken promises. One year ago the McGuinty government, in a very short-sighted move, delisted primary eye care services for adults between the ages of 19 and 64, thus breaking their promise to provide universal, accessible health care to all Ontarians. People must now pay out of their pocket for eye care services.

For a government that has focused so much attention on health promotion and prevention, to the point they are even paying for a minister, it is ironic they have cut funding for primary eye care services that do just that: prevent sight-threatening diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetes. We know this government is failing to appropriately invest in primary eye health and vision care services that optometrists today provide to patients. Early detection of eye disease is absolutely critical to the successful treatment of many conditions.

It is time this government recognized the importance of providing the resources in order that eye problems can be detected early and appropriate treatment be provided so that people avoid permanent vision loss.

VETERANS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): In Ontario, we take time during the first part of November to honour those veterans who fought for our country, our freedom and for peace during the many conflicts of the last century, and particularly those who lost their lives in war and peacekeeping missions. For many, the most visible way in which we remember our veterans is to wear a poppy. Brantford resident Stan Wawzonek started a tradition

wherein we ask servicemen and women to wear two poppies to make it easier for us to say thank you to these veterans.

In my riding I have been honoured over the last eight years to be associated with the Thank-A-Vet luncheon to express our appreciation to the veterans of Brantford, Brant and Six Nations/New Credit. This is the largest event of its kind in Canada and sees the attendance of over 650 veterans and widows who come for a complimentary lunch and a chance to meet friends and share their memories. The event continues to be a huge success due to the efforts of the Thank-A-Vet committee and the many volunteers, patrons, students, sponsors and city officials who donate their time, energy and money to make this event happen.

I encourage all members of this House and of this province to thank a veteran, and veterans everywhere, but particularly in their own riding. What is most important: We will remember.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): Just over a week ago, I had to take my son Kennedy to Scarborough Hospital following a knee injury in hockey practice earlier that night. I have two bits of good news to share with members here. The first is that Kennedy suffered just a strained knee ligament and he's already back on the ice. The second is the fact that I was able to experience at first hand the significant improvements to health care brought forward by the McGuinty government, right in my own backyard.

Following an X-ray taken at Scarborough Hospital, I was invited by Dr. C. Tyu to a room with a large computer screen. Dr. Tyu said to me that he was not giving me special treatment, but that due to an investment made by the McGuinty government he was about to show me an example of how health care in Ontario was improving.

Some time ago the McGuinty government invested in a new project at Scarborough Hospital called PACS, which stands for picture archiving communications system. This is an electronic network that allows the digital transmission, storage, display and retrieval of medical images such as X-rays, MRIs and mammograms.

Upon taking the picture of my son's knee, it was placed into a secure Internet site where it was immediately made available to the physician treating my son in emergency. It could have been immediately made available and easily accessed by my family doctor or a specialist at any time. We were able to do in minutes what used to take hours. This not only saves time, it saves money as well through quicker results, without the need to develop film, and the doctor does not physically have to be with the patient to interpret the test results.

The installation of the PAC system at Scarborough Hospital is one example of many demonstrating how the McGuinty government is making a difference in the lives of Ontarians.

COLLEGES

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Today is Colleges Day at the Legislature and a wonderful opportunity to recognize the important role that our colleges play as leaders in learning.

Colleges are celebrating their 40th anniversary this year. In those 40 years, more than one million people have graduated from Ontario colleges—people who have helped to drive economic growth and make this province a better place to live.

Our 24 colleges are an accessible option to quality post-secondary education in Ontario. The options for education and training are many and varied at the 100 campuses located all across this province.

Our colleges deliver modern, technically advanced programs leading to certificates, diplomas or applied degrees, as well as in-class apprenticeship training. This in turn leads to quality, high-paying jobs such as animation artist and biotechnologist. That's why our college system plays such a key role in Reaching Higher: The McGuinty Government Plan for Postsecondary Education. Reaching Higher is the largest multi-year investment for Ontario's higher education system since the founding of this system.

The \$6.2 billion in funding is an unprecedented new investment in Ontario's colleges, universities and training system. The college in my home of Peterborough, Sir Sanford Fleming College, received \$4.2 million in new capital money this spring. These funds are part of a \$250-million capital injection made to the province's post-secondary education. Sir Sanford used the money to upgrade its heating, ventilation and cooling system to make it more environmentally and economically efficient. It also totally renovated its chemistry labs, which will support increased enrolment in health programs.

We know that the key to success in a competitive growth economy is our community college system.

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a copy of an order in council appointing the Honourable James Bradley, MPP, as a commissioner to the Board of Internal Economy, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council from among the members of the executive council in the place of the Honourable Dwight Duncan, MPP.

ANNUAL REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the 2004-05 annual report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TRUSTEE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES FIDUCIAIRES

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to amend the Trustee Act and the Limitations Act, 2002 with respect to a limitation period for actions for wrongful death and other estate matters / Projet de loi 17, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les fiduciaires et la Loi de 2002 sur la prescription des actions en ce qui concerne le délai de prescription pour les actions engagées à la suite d'un décès dû à un acte délictuel et d'autres questions relatives au patrimoine.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Jennifer Dawson was infected with HIV through tainted blood and died of transfusion-associated AIDS at the age of 40. She is survived by three children—Tamara Lynne, Julie Anne and Mathew Patrick.

Their father, Patrick Dawson, brought to my attention a defect in Ontario's limitations law that precludes wrongful death claims unless the tort is discovered within two years of death. This bill before us rectifies that defect by amending section 38 of the Trustee Act to provide for the limitation period for an action to expire on the second anniversary of the day on which a claim was actually discovered, rather than the second anniversary of the day of death.

The adoption of this amendment will allow the Dawson family to apply for compensation that was made available to other persons and estates that were affected by HIV blood through blood transfusions under a plan by the Red Cross that was established under a federal bankruptcy law. This amendment will bring Ontario's law into line with every other province in Canada, and I do hope all members of the Legislature will support this important legislation.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, November 1, 2005, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker: All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthur, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Parsons, Ernie
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Patten, Richard
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Peterson, Tim
Bartolucci, Rick	Jeffrey, Linda	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Klees, Frank	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldeep	Racco, Mario G.
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Runciman, Robert W.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Martinuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Cordiano, Joseph	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Craitor, Kim	McGuinty, Dalton	Sterling, Norman W.
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Tory, John
Duguid, Brad	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Duncan, Dwight	Milloy, John	Watson, Jim
Flaherty, Jim	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Gerretsen, John	Munro, Julia	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gravelle, Michael	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Martel, Shelley	
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 75; the nays are 7.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I want to bring to the members' attention, in the Speaker's gallery, the mayor of Manitouwadge, Darrell Chisholm, and the mayor of Winnie the Pooh's hometown, White River, Roger Drolet.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

PERSPECTIVES ÉCONOMIQUES

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of Cabinet): I rise to present the 2005 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

It has been said that leadership requires equal parts optimism and realism, that we need to be optimistic enough to seize the opportunities before us and realistic enough to face the challenges. At the midway point of our first mandate, we are confident about Ontario's future.

À mi-chemin de notre premier mandat, nous envisageons l'avenir de l'Ontario avec optimisme.

Ontario's economy is performing solidly. A number of sectors are doing well, employment is up, and growth is better than expected. Since we have taken office, Ontario businesses have created more than 193,000 new jobs. The current consensus of private sector forecasts for Ontario's real growth in 2005 has increased from 2.3% at the time of the budget to 2.5% today. We anticipate continued solid growth in 2006 and 2007.

We are confident as well that our plan is the right plan to secure Ontario's future prosperity.

Nous sommes aussi confiants d'avoir le bon plan pour assurer la prospérité future de l'Ontario.

We are working with the people of this province to enhance Ontario's economic advantage by strengthening the education and skills of our people, improving their health, fostering innovation, leveraging diversity, and insuring we get the fundamentals, including energy and infrastructure, right. We are making these investments in our future prosperity at the same time as we are reducing the province's deficit.

This government is providing strong and prudent financial management.

Nous avons instauré une gestion financière rigoureuse et prudente.

Winston Churchill once said, "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." Premier McGuinty and his government are all about results, and the results are good for Ontario. Let me tell you about it, Mr. Speaker.

Our economic foundations are firm and the outlook is positive, though challenges lie ahead. This year, there has been strong job growth in information and culture, wholesale and retail trade, education, finance, insurance, real estate and construction. Unemployment is expected to average 6.7%, the lowest since 2001. Retail spending is up, the housing market remains robust, and overall real consumer spending is also on the rise.

Ontario's auto sector continues to be a top producer in North America, with \$4.5 billion in new investments, including a new Toyota plant, which have secured over 19,000 jobs and are creating 1,800 new jobs.

Ontario is also North America's second-largest employer of information and communications technology workers. It is the business and head office capital of Canada. The province's financial and business services sectors are performing well.

With some of the world's best theatre and cultural attractions, this is the national hub for the arts. Employment in film and the media is on the rise as a result of this government's policies.

Turning to our resources, the mining sector has a promising future, with strong global demand generating higher mineral prices. On the other hand, forestry faces enormous challenges. In response, our government has committed an unprecedented \$680 million in support to help this sector compete globally, and we're confident they will compete globally.

The agri-food industry has seen improved market prices, though farmers have needed support through marketing, innovation and income safety nets.

Dans son ensemble, l'économie ontarienne se porte bien.

Overall, our economy is doing well.

In light of the growth in the economy this year, we have increased our own projection for real GDP growth from 2% to 2.2%. The government is working hard to ensure that Ontario is prepared to weather any challenges that may lie ahead by bolstering the foundations of economic growth.

We are investing in the education and skills of our people, from the early years to our historic \$6.2-billion investment in universities, colleges and training programs. To win the innovation race, we are making strategic investments in research and development through our newly created Ontario research fund.

Ontario should be the first to discover new ideas, the first to turn them into new products and services, and the first to market those products and services to the world, and because of this government's policies, we will.

We are also working to leverage our greatest strength—our diversity—by attracting the best and brightest from around the world and fully integrating them into our society and economy.

We are working to get the fundamentals right.

New electricity generation capacity is on the way. Currently, there are more than 9,000 megawatts at various stages of development—enough power for 4.1 million homes. We are on target to meet our goal of 5% renewable generation by 2007, we're taking action to ensure that prices are competitive, and new smart meters will eventually help everyone conserve energy.

In the 2005 budget, we announced \$30 billion in an infrastructure investment plan. Since then, we have announced new road upgrades to highways across Ontario, and we have announced or broken ground at affordable housing projects in Waterloo, Guelph, Hamilton, Brantford, Vaughan, Peterborough and Kingston.

To help speed up the movement of people and goods, we have announced improvements to border crossings at Windsor, Sarnia and Niagara.

To date, the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority has committed to provide up to \$2.1 billion in low-cost financing to 170 municipalities for more than 1,100 local municipal infrastructure works projects.

We have begun hospital expansions or renovations in Sudbury, London, Oakville, Barrie, Almonte, Ottawa, Belleville, Mississauga and Toronto, as well as announcing a new hospital for the St. Catharines-Niagara region.

At the same time, we are improving the health of our people by reducing wait times for key medical procedures and expanding access to doctors, nurses and other health care professionals.

Turning now to our fiscal plan, I would like to update you on our progress.

Notre objectif d'éliminer le déficit dont nous avons hérité est en voie d'être atteint. We are on track to eliminate the deficit we inherited.

Higher-than-anticipated revenues allow us to project the 2005-06 deficit to be \$2.4 billion. That's a \$427-million improvement from our 2005 budget projection. If the reserve is not required, the deficit is projected to be \$1.4 billion. Although we are slightly ahead of plan this year, in light of what we know about the risks that our economy faces, we are not revising our deficit-elimination target. As was stated in the 2005 budget, the deficit will be eliminated no later than 2008-09, or a year earlier, in 2007-08, if the reserve is not required.

1410

Our balanced, responsible approach to eliminating the deficit, while continuing to make essential investments in education, health and the economy, is working for Ontarians. We must continue, however, to manage the province's finances prudently. Overall, our expenditures are on target and our plan is disciplined. Our prudent approach to expenditures will be even more important now to help us ensure that we are equally prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

While we are optimistic about economic growth, it is important to remember that there are clouds on the horizon. These are risks that are beyond our control. The Canadian dollar hit a 13-year high in September; oil prices have increased dramatically; and the US economic outlook faces challenges. As a result, private sector forecasters have decreased their estimates for Ontario's GDP growth in 2006 from an average of 2.9% to 2.6%. We have also reduced our projection from 2.8% to 2.6%. The forecast is still positive for Ontario. We still anticipate solid economic growth; indeed, growth that is better than this year.

The US economy has continued to grow at a strong pace, remaining close to our projections in the 2005 budget. The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma has disrupted the US economy, although rebuilding effort will likely stimulate activity in the final months of 2005 and early 2006. While the US economy also faces risks, forecasters are, on balance, optimistic that growth will continue at a healthy pace.

The most significant change this year has been the price of oil. At the time of our 2005 budget, forecasters projected that crude prices would average US\$49.10 a barrel in 2005. Since then, prices and projections have risen sharply.

Another challenge going forward is the value of our dollar. The average forecast for the Canadian dollar is over US84 cents in 2006, two cents higher than projected earlier this year. For Ontarians visiting the United States, this is positive. For Ontario companies making capital

machinery investments to improve productivity, this is good news. It does, however, make it harder for Ontario exporters to compete. We've seen that exporters are responding to the challenge by increasing productivity, lowering costs and shifting toward higher-value-added products. As a result, in the short term, export volumes are expected to increase marginally.

There is a considerable difference of opinion about the future path of the dollar, but it is unlikely that the dollar will decline significantly in value in the short term. Overall, the economy must, and will, adjust to this new reality.

Another challenge to the economy is the \$23-billion gap between what Ontarians contribute to the federal government and what they receive in return. We will continue to seek a full and effective partnership with the federal government to address the issue of this gap.

This year, in accordance with the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, we have added some new features to the fall report. These include an estimate of tax expenditures as well as information on how Ontarians can contribute their ideas as we prepare our next budget. We are committed to accountability and transparency because they contribute to a stronger, more informed democracy.

We are proud of the progress Ontario is making.

Nous sommes fiers des progrès que l'Ontario accomplit.

We are realistic about the challenges we will face.

We are optimistic that, with our plan, Ontarians can and will succeed.

Working together we can, and we will, seize the almost limitless opportunities of the 21st century.

We can, and we will, build a quality of life that is second to none.

Nous allons donner à l'Ontario une qualité de vie incomparable.

We can, and we will, fulfill the aspirations that Ontarians share, for our province, our country, and most of all, for our children and our children's children.

This government is making progress. We're on track. We're sticking to the plan. We're delivering real results, just as we said we would.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): What's plain today is that under new Liberal Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, the deficit is going up. What an inauspicious debut for the new finance minister. Greg Sorbara left a deficit of \$1.6 billion in 2004-05. Today, the minister reports a deficit of \$2.4 billion. Dwight Duncan increased the deficit by 50% in two weeks' time.

The McGuinty Liberal government has raked and clawed in from Ontario taxpayers some additional \$13 billion in new revenues. Despite that massive revenue grab, there's no break for hard-pressed Ontario taxpayers, no stimulation for businesses struggling to create jobs in Ontario. This debut by the finance minister is going to go over like a flat \$9 Diet Coke.

Today in Ottawa, Justice Gomery reported on an irresponsible Liberal spending spree, and today in Ontario, Dwight Duncan is reporting on irresponsible Liberal spending in our province. Clearly, the reason the McGuinty Liberals are hiding behind the skirts of the Gomery report today is because there is no good news for hard-pressed taxpayers to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario; no good news for hard-pressed businesses worried about the economy, businesses hesitating to invest in new jobs or expansion in our province. Despite massive new revenue through higher taxes and fees, the McGuinty Liberals still cannot get through their voracious appetite to continue to spend taxpayer dollars.

Let me tell you about this. We all grew up in a province that was the leader, the lead province, the engine of growth in this country, proud to be part of the powerhouse economy that pulled the rest of Canada forward. Every Canadian—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Member for Erie-Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: Our province was the envy of every Canadian, but not so in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, not so today, not so in 2005. Economic indicators continue to show our economy, which used to be the leader in Canada, continuing to fall behind competitive states and other provinces.

Statistics Canada recently reported that housing starts have decreased by 16.7%. However, nine of the 12 areas in the entire country that showed that decline are in Ontario: Windsor, Hamilton, Toronto, Sudbury, London, Ottawa, St. Catharines, Niagara, Kingston and Thunder Bay.

Retail sales are falling way behind the national average. The hospitality industry reports their sales are behind the national average. In March, the CFIB released a survey indicating that business confidence in Ontario remains flat. Sadder still, for the first time since World War II, for five consecutive months Ontario's unemployment rate has been above the national average. That has not happened in 60 years. Under this government's watch, 42,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this year alone.

The minister says there are clouds on the horizon. There's a perfect storm gathering for Ontario consumers: Hydro rates are going through the roof; Dalton McGuinty has increased taxes substantially on working families; home heating costs are going up; gasoline costs are far higher than they've been in a long time; drivers' licence fees; eye exams. The average working family in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario is paying \$2,000 more a year than before Dalton McGuinty, let alone seniors and young people trying to get ahead. It's simply unaffordable. Dalton McGuinty and the new finance minister continue to take more and more money out of their pockets.

1420

We would have thought on this side of the House, with a \$13-billion windfall, that there would be some break for working families, for taxpayers in our province,

that there would have been some initiative to stimulate job growth and investment in an economy that looks like it's in jeopardy. But instead, we see job losses, higher unemployment, higher hydro, higher taxes, and out-of-control spending, resulting in a 50% deficit increase on the new minister and \$2,000 less in each working family's pockets in our province. That is the real economic outlook that the McGuinty government has delivered to Ontarians today, one sadly very unpromising for Ontario's working families.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to begin to respond to the government's statement by saying that people across Ontario should wonder why the McGuinty government is presenting their economic statement on the day when the Gomery Commission is reporting all the nefarious activities of the Liberal Party at the federal level. I think there's only one reason: This is a government that is trying to bury the story about their economic statement. Why are they trying to bury it? Consider it from the perspective of the ordinary Ontarian. Consider it from the perspective of somebody out there who's working harder, working longer, and yet, at the end of the month, they find they're having a harder time paying the bills.

Think about the average Ontarian who heard Dalton McGuinty say he was going to freeze electricity prices. What they've seen are double-digit increases in electricity rates from the McGuinty government. Think about the average Ontarian who heard the Minister of Tourism, Mr. Bradley, say he had a plan to control gasoline prices. The Minister of Northern Development, Mr. Bartolucci, too had a plan to control gasoline prices. Mr. Colle, the Minister of Immigration, too had a plan to control gasoline prices. The Premier said he had a plan to control gasoline prices. Now that they're the government, gas prices, heating prices—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I can wait. Order. I need to be able to hear the leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: I think too of people who heard Dalton McGuinty say there would be no cuts to health care under a McGuinty government, and now, if they have to see an optometrist, they pay out of their pocket. If they need to see a physiotherapist, they pay out of their pocket. If they need chiropractic care, they pay out of their pocket. Why? Because the Premier who promised no cuts to health care has cut those health care services.

Think about the people who heard the McGuinty government say that they recognize that Ontario's property tax assessment system was all messed up and they were going to fix it. Now they're getting property tax assessments that are increasing not by 10%, not by 15%, but by 30%, 40% and 50%, and the McGuinty government says, "Oh, there's nothing we can do." Then, think about the people who heard Premier McGuinty, looking into the television camera, say, "I won't raise your taxes." Now they're paying an unfair and regressive health tax that hits lowest- and modest-income families the hardest.

A modest-income family with an income of \$35,000 a year is paying through the nose. Somebody who has an income of \$1 million under the McGuinty health tax gets off lightly. That's the perspective of the average working Ontarian, and they will know why the McGuinty government is trying to bury their economic statement on the day that the Gomery commission reports.

All we need to do is look at some of Ontario's leading companies and hear what they have to say. Dofasco, one of our main manufacturers, is very clear. They said—get this—they've lowered their use of electricity by 23% through conservation, but their electricity costs have gone up by more than 50%. They say to the government that this is creating real problems for them as a major Ontario manufacturer and for all Ontario manufacturers. They point out, "We are asking the government to do everything possible and sustainable to make Ontario's electricity costs competitive—to keep Ontario a competitive place to do business."

They say, "It has become a significant issue for us.... We look at other jurisdictions where we do business, and in some cases Ontario's electricity costs are double, with a lot more volatility...."

This, to me, doesn't suggest good news; this suggests that the 42,000 manufacturing jobs that have already been lost under the McGuinty government are about to be eclipsed by the loss of more manufacturing jobs.

Let me refer to the forest sector, which says the same things. We're looking here at the loss, potentially, of 75,000 manufacturing jobs. They are very clear. They want the McGuinty government to develop a fair and rational electricity policy, not one which forces paper mills and pulp mills to pay four times the cost of electricity—

The Speaker: Thank you.

DEFERRED VOTES

ADOPTION INFORMATION DISCLOSURE ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LA DIVULGATION DE RENSEIGNEMENTS SUR LES ADOPTIONS

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 183, An Act respecting the disclosure of information and records to adopted persons and birth parents / Projet de loi 183, Loi traitant de la divulgation de renseignements et de dossiers aux personnes adoptées et à leurs pères ou mères de sang.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a 5-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1428 to 1433.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes	Nays
Arthurs, Wayne	Hampton, Howard
Bartolucci, Rick	Horwath, Andrea
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat
Bisson, Gilles	Jeffrey, Linda
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kennedy, Gerard
Bradley, James J.	Kormos, Peter
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave
Charley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy
Cordiano, Joseph	Martel, Shelley
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah
Crozier, Bruce	McGuinty, Dalton
Dhillon, Vic	McMeekin, Ted
Dombrowsky, Leona	McNeely, Phil
Duguid, Brad	Meilleur, Madeleine
Duncan, Dwight	Milloy, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol
Gerretsen, John	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Gravelle, Michael	Orazietti, David

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized.

Ayes	Nays
Arrott, Ted	Martinuk, Gerry
Barrett, Toby	Munro, Julia
Flaherty, Jim	Murdoch, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 68; the nays are 19.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

VISITOR

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order and with your indulgence: I rise today to recognize a truly special Ontarian. Rita Buffalo, who is in the members' gallery to your left, is the first Ontarian ever to receive the Council of the Federation Literacy Award.

Just briefly, growing up, Ms. Buffalo received very little formal education, but as an adult she enrolled in a basic skills and literacy class, improving so much that she qualified for college in only four years. In 2002, she graduated with honours. Today, she is a literacy co-ordinator for the same program that helped her. She now helps others reach their full potential. She's an inspiration to all of us, and on behalf of all Ontarians, I congratulate her.

USE OF MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Yesterday, the member for Guelph–Wellington contravened established precedents

in this House when, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, she presented what amounted to a government announcement in this House.

During members' statements, she announced the wholly inadequate financial commitment of the government to the townships of Centre Wellington and Mapleton, which doesn't go far enough to assist these communities with their costs related to the devastating tornadoes that struck our area on August 19.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety, which, of course, is the ministry responsible for emergency services and response, it is inappropriate that the government used the member for Guelph-Wellington to publicly announce for the first time its insufficient commitment to my communities. Of course, by making the announcement during members' statements, the opposition parties did not have an opportunity to respond in this House. This is why there is an established precedent upheld repeatedly by a number of Speakers which says a parliamentary assistant should not be permitted to make a member's statement which falls under the responsibility of the ministry he or she is affiliated with.

This is the first available opportunity I have had to present this in the House, and I would ask that you clarify this matter for all members so as to ensure that the government doesn't continue to use the time reserved for members' statements for government announcements, contrary to the established precedents of this place.

1440

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to point out that the announcement in question was not from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The announcement was on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as was the cheque, and the letters had been sent to the mayors of the municipalities in question on a previous occasion.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I appreciate the point of order. I will take it under advisement and get back to the member.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Under the cover of the Gomory report into the Liberal sponsorship scandal, your government has today delivered—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We're off to a bad start. I need to be able to hear the Leader of the Opposition and other members. We need to show respect for the people who have the floor.

Mr. Tory: Your government has today delivered an economic update that the Acting Premier yesterday called

"very good news for the people of Ontario." The minister today referred to "very good results." I guess it's very good results if you're the government, because the only thing that's really up is taxes, up by hundreds of millions of dollars. If you compare today's statement to your own budget, I say to the Premier, GDP growth is projected to be down, housing starts are in decline, retail sales are going down next year, personal income is going down next year, job creation is going down next year, wages and salaries are going down next year, and corporate profits are going down next year.

My question is this: I don't know where it fits within the "very good news" that we have lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario in the past year. Can you point to one single initiative we heard about today in your economic statement that will directly address the fate of those 42,000 families, the companies they work for, and the communities they live in—one thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Obviously, I cannot possibly share the very negative, pessimistic outlook brought by my friend opposite when it comes to opportunities and prosperity in the province of Ontario. He cannot have had the opportunity recently to interact with business, for example, which has, as a result of its efforts, generated 193,100 new jobs since we've had the privilege of forming the government, and the fact that our economic growth has exceeded expectations during the first half of 2005. So we are increasing our growth assumption from 2.0% to 2.2%, some 193,100 new jobs; and our assumptions with respect to growth are on the rise. We think that's a pretty good record.

Mr. Tory: Well, in fact, the assumptions with respect to growth are not on the rise. If you look at your budget of earlier this year and the statement today, GDP growth is down, housing starts are down, retail sales are down, personal income is down, and job creation is down. All of those things are going down if you compare this statement today to the budget earlier this year.

Now, there was also in the statement today absolutely no relief, notwithstanding your windfall of money, for the hard-working families who are paying \$2,000 more each in taxes imposed by the McGuinty Liberals since they came to office. Do you consider it very good news, I ask the Premier, that families are working harder and falling behind, and that you couldn't find your way clear to put one thing in this economic statement to provide some relief for those families that are paying \$2,000 more in taxes and charges of various kinds since the McGuinty Liberals came to office? Not one thing for them. Is that good news?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I just don't share the doom-and-gloom outlook brought by the leader of the official opposition, and it's not something that I would hazard to say is shared, either—his perspective of it, that is—by the people of Ontario. They are working hard, and as I say, they've generated 193,100 new jobs.

I can tell you that when I speak to Ontarians, either families or businesses alike, they are very enthusiastic

about the fact that we managed to find \$6.2 billion that we're investing into training, colleges and universities. That's the way of the future: developing our human capital. I think Ontarians are confident and pleased with the direction they themselves are pursuing.

Mr. Tory: In your economic statement today you claim to have identified \$407 million in program review savings on your four-year target of \$750 million, which itself is less than a 1% saving. I notice these claimed savings you found come with a very precise number: It's not \$408 million and it's not \$406 million; it's \$407 million. My question to the Premier is this: With this very precise number there is obviously a very precise list that totals \$407 million. Will you table that list in this Legislature tomorrow so that we can all see how it is you've achieved those savings of \$407 million?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I am proud of the efforts we are making to realize efficiencies and find savings so that any precious tax dollars we have can be devoted to ensuring that we're getting real, positive results for Ontarians. I know the leader of the official opposition doesn't like to hear this because it's good news. I want to say it again: 193,100 new jobs; retail sales are 5.1% ahead of last year; Ontario new vehicle sales are 4% ahead of last year's pace; Ontario home resales rose 10.8% in August; manufacturing shipments have jumped 5.7% to almost \$27 billion and that's the highest level in 12 months. The Minister of Finance said a few moments ago that we have the lowest level of unemployment now since—

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Since 2001.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Since 2001. I think the numbers speak for themselves. Ontarians are confident in their economy.

Mr. Tory: My question is to the Premier and it again concerns the economic statement. Earlier today a coalition of northern Ontario mayors and business and forestry industry leaders were here urging you to act further to address the crisis situation faced in communities across the north with respect to their industry and others. They have clearly stated, and they did clearly state to us this morning, that your current initiatives are not enough. Since 2002 the forest industry has shed more than 5,000 direct jobs, and according to a CIBC report on the pulp and paper sector, "Ontario has the dubious distinction as the leading province in Canada ... when it comes to job loss and mill closures."

The coalition visiting here today asked you, the Premier, and your government to guarantee there would be no increased charges and fees, no new charges and fees and no more burdensome regulations until these issues are addressed and the forestry situation improves. Are you prepared to make that commitment even though there wasn't a word of this in your statement today? Are you prepared to make the commitment they ask for in respect to charges and fees and regulations?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We acknowledge that the forest sector is a major contributor to Ontario's economy, not just in the north but here in the south as well. We also, I

think, all understand that the forestry sector is undergoing an international shake-up. Rather than sit on our hands, we have put together a package of \$680 million. That strategy consists of a \$150-million forest sector prosperity fund, \$28 million annually to help support maintenance of primary access roads, \$10 million by way of a new annual inventory program, a \$1-million annual Ontario Works promotion program, and this is on top of a \$350 million loan guarantee program—\$680 million. What I would ask my friend opposite to do, and the leader of the NDP as well, is to call upon the federal government. We've thrown down the gauntlet. We've asked them to match this program. We think working together we can do a lot for the forestry sector in Ontario.

Mr. Tory: I ask the Premier: Have you phoned the Prime Minister and asked him personally whether he would come on board to match your initiative? Have you bothered to do that? Why don't you tell us?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I did, in fact, speak with the Prime Minister on the weekend. We spoke specifically about issues pertaining to Kashechewan and the affected families there. However, I would suggest to the leader of the official opposition that if he would like to prepare a list of issues that he would like me to raise, strictly by way of phone calls, I will see if I can work it into my schedule.

1450

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Stop the clock.
Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is, it's your job to prepare that list and to make the calls, and you're not making them. Nothing whatsoever can cover up for that.

Another subject you might put on that list is farming. Again, in the statement today, nothing but disappointment: 76% of Ontario's farm and agri-business members reported a decline in farm income in the past year, fuel costs have risen for 82% of those surveyed, and insurance costs are up for 75%. Premier, these are real people living on farms and in rural communities across this province, and they're finding it difficult to make ends meet. Last week, they called for a substantial amount of help from you, and in the budget, you literally bragged about cutting the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Can you point to one single thing that addresses the needs and the struggles of the farmers and the agri-business and rural economy of Ontario in this statement today? Is there one thing there, other than one line referring to them, that's going to help farmers?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I know the Minister of Agriculture would like to speak to this.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm very happy to have the opportunity to remind the Leader of the Opposition of this government's commitment to the agriculture community in the province of Ontario. We have provided \$175 million to grains and oilseeds people; we have provided \$138.5 million to beef farmers in the time of the BSE crisis. Our government has made it very clear. We

committed \$20 million to assist farmers to establish their nutrient management plans for large farms. We've always said we committed \$20 million. The program was oversubscribed, and just last week, our government added \$3.7 million to that commitment to support farmers in Ontario. That's our commitment to agriculture.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, today in Ontario, ordinary folks are paying more for electricity, more for home heating costs and more for gasoline. They're paying more out of their own pockets for delisted health services like optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic care. They're facing out-of-control property tax assessments, and they're paying a lot more because of your unfair regressive health tax.

Can you provide hard-working Ontarians with your best estimate of how much more the average family will have to pay for electricity, gasoline, heating, fuel, property tax and health services in the year ahead under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): There's no question that there will be an increase in the price of electricity and gasoline. We are committed to replacing the coal-fired plants, and we are committed to the people of Ontario having to pay the full cost of electricity for this province.

However, having said that, we are in the process of replacing, rebuilding, maximizing and developing a culture of conservation in order to meet our targets. Let me assure you—we have just received another for 1,015 megawatts from the Calpine—we are on our way to replacing coal-fired generation.

Mr. Hampton: Well, I don't think hard-working families will get any reassurance from that answer. The truth is that electricity rates will go up by double digits again under the McGuinty government in the new year; the truth is that the heating bill will soar by at least 30% this winter; the truth is that an unfair property tax system will drive property taxes through the roof again, and the truth is that this year the full amount of the McGuinty unfair regressive health tax will come off people's tax bills.

For ordinary citizens, this is the perfect economic storm.

Can the people of Ontario expect an answer from the Premier? Are you going to do anything to help people this winter, Premier, with all the new bills, all the new costs, all the new taxes you've heaped upon them?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I just find this amazing. This was the government that actually put up hydro rates by 40%. They actually cancelled all of the conservation projects. They cancelled the Beck tunnel; they cancelled Conawapa. They do not like water; they do not like gas; they do not like coal. Now they don't even like water from Manitoba. I find it difficult to answer a question when it doesn't have credibility behind it.

Mr. Hampton: I think families that are having a hard time paying the bills are going to have an increasingly hard time with the fact that this is a Liberal government—a McGuinty government—that has absolutely no empathy for them.

Here is the reality: The McGuinty government's policies—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. We're having a difficult afternoon, aren't we? We need to be quiet while people who have the floor are either asking a question or responding to one. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Here is the reality: All kinds of people in this province are finding it more difficult. They are having a harder time under the McGuinty government than they had even under the previous Conservative government. The cost of living is going through the roof. The rent isn't coming down, tuition fees are going up, electricity rates are going up, gas prices are going up, heating fuel costs are going up and health taxes are going up. I say again, can the Premier tell us how he expects average Ontarians to continue to pay more and more under the McGuinty government with no help, no assistance—not even any empathy—from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Actually, that simply is not totally complete in its information. The fact of the matter is that there are a number of programs supporting folks. One of them, for example, is Out of the Cold. Another is Share the Warmth in Brampton. We have an emergency fund for folks. As a matter of fact, in Hamilton, where we have some significant challenges, Hamilton Utilities has a policy where the hydro is not cut off. They actually work with people in order to find and manage—

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: In terms of trying to respond, you would find that electricity prices have been stable. In fact, we had a rebate, which we are in the process of giving back, and we have put in place programs to mitigate costs. They're absolutely across this province, and we're developing that culture of conservation.

FIRST NATIONS REVENUE SHARING

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I'm sure that someone who is having a hard time paying the rent and putting food on the table is going to get a lot of satisfaction out of that response from the McGuinty government.

Premier, your aboriginal affairs minister claimed yesterday that your government wants to address First Nations poverty and challenges with revenue sharing. If your government is suddenly committed to First Nations revenue sharing, can you explain why your government deserted Bill 97, the First Nations Resource Revenue Sharing Act, this summer?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

1500

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Bill 97, the one you referred to that was put forward by the member from Timmins–James Bay, was very narrow in its scope, in that it outlined that basically business, government and First Nations should discuss how this should happen. What I've done with our First Nations is said that we should have government-to-government negotiations and discussions with our First Nations about how we can all share more greatly from the benefit of our natural resources. We outlined that in the throne speech, and we will be commencing those discussions at the northern table starting next month.

Mr. Hampton: I attended a lot of the Bill 97 hearings, and First Nations were unanimous in saying this is what they wanted. In fact, they brought forward all kinds of constructive suggestions. Passing Mr. Bisson's First Nations revenue-sharing act would have ensured that First Nations receive tax revenues and other revenues from mining and forestry operations conducted on their lands, like municipalities do.

Instead, what you've done, and what we found yesterday, is you actually cut money out of infrastructure funds for sewer and water. At the very time when First Nations are having great difficulty with tainted water, not only are you not helping, you're cutting.

So explain: How does it help First Nations when on the one hand you cut money that otherwise would have gone to them to help them deal with tainted water, and then you come along and you desert the First Nations revenue-sharing act? How does any of that help First Nations?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The member this afternoon, I guess, is consistent in his ability to ignore the facts. He knows that the program he has referred to involved indoor plumbing and not safe water or water treatment systems. He knows that and he should state that. That program had long expired.

I would say to the member that he knows that the bill he's referring to is very narrow in scope because it just involved revenue-sharing. As the member would know as a northerner, there are tremendous benefits to be shared with the development of our natural resources, far more than revenue: entrepreneurial activities and opportunities and jobs. So we want to have a complete discussion. I would never come into the Legislature and say, "I know what the answer is for First Nations," and plunk it down on the Clerk's table without a thorough discussion with our First Nation neighbours.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government says that \$48 million under the NDP and \$70 million under the Conservatives to hook residences up to the sewer and water system was wasted. What nonsense. People wouldn't have been connected to the sewer and water system without those investments, and now you've cut them.

I want to quote Grand Chief Stan Beardy of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, who says that if the First

Nations revenue-sharing act isn't passed, "it's sending a very negative message from Ontario to my people and our youth." He says, "It really shows the [government] is not prepared to work with First Nations. That's what is most disappointing."

That's the grand chief of NAN. He attended the hearings. He commented on the bill. He said the bill had to move forward.

My question to the Premier is this: Is this how you take First Nations seriously, Premier? You ignore the grand chief and you cut the very money that would have helped some communities deal with tainted water?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I guess I would say to the member that the bill wasn't good enough, that we think we can do a more comprehensive job and look at all the benefits that we can all share from the development of our natural resources. It's more than just straight money; it's jobs and entrepreneurial activities throughout northern Ontario, and looking at new businesses, like we're going to extract or harvest the biomass from our forest floor. Instead of wasting it and putting it out into the environment, we can harness that for the great energy potential that it has to save our forestry jobs up there. We're starting to have those discussions. That's part of the new approach that this government has developed with aboriginal peoples, and I'm very proud of that approach.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): My question is to the Premier. Premier, we now understand why you're hiding your economic statement behind the skirts of the Gomery report. What has become very clear is that you reported a deficit last year of \$1.6 billion. Today your economic statement says the deficit has gone up to \$2.4 billion. Despite an increase of some \$13 billion that you've clawed away from Ontario taxpayers, you are increasing the deficit by 50% this year. Please explain how it's possible, with that revenue windfall, that you're increasing the deficit by 50%.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The budget last year projected a deficit of \$2.6 billion. The reserve was not needed. It came down to \$1.6 billion. In the 2005 budget, the budget projected a deficit of \$2.8 billion. We're now saying it's \$2.4 billion. That's where it is. If we don't need the reserve, it will be \$1.4 billion next year. The numbers are clearly laid out in the statement and present a very good picture about the downward direction of the deficit of Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: The minister says the numbers are clearly laid out, but you keep changing the plan. You've had about five different financial plans since taking office. There hasn't been a target that you haven't missed.

I cannot believe that despite a \$13-billion increase in revenue—despite the fact that you've reached deeper into

the pockets of working families, despite the fact that you're reaching into the pockets of seniors with higher hydro rates, despite the fact that you're reaching into the pockets of small businesses and slowing down our economy—how is it possible that in two weeks' time Dwight Duncan increased the deficit from \$1.6 billion last year to \$2.4 billion this year? How is that in any way possible?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It's not possible, and it didn't happen.

Let me compare records. Let's talk about a government that said it had a balanced budget and left a deficit of \$5.5 billion. Shame on you. You have no credibility. Let's talk about a government that increased expenditures 21% in their last three years—more than this government has ever done—at the same time that revenues were declining. That's your record; that's your legacy. You ought to be ashamed of it.

We are on track to balance the budget according to the plan laid out by my predecessor, Mr. Sorbara. That plan is a good plan; it's working. The deficit is down; jobs are up; employment is up; unemployment is down. Everything that should be up is up, and everything that should be down is down—the reverse of what happened under that government. We're proud of our record. We stand behind it, and we're going to continue to fight for the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Order.

New question.

ENERGY RATES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. On Monday, Dofasco announced that its third quarter earnings fell 95% from 2004. Why? Ontario's skyrocketing electricity rates. To quote a Dofasco spokesman, "We are asking the government to do everything possible and sustainable to make Ontario's electricity costs competitive—to keep Ontario a competitive place to do business."

Ontario has lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs under your watch. Can you provide Ontarians with your best estimate of how many more good manufacturing jobs will disappear in Ontario because of the McGuinty government's failed electricity policies?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Energy.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): Let me also quote from that particular release, where it very clearly identifies that "there was a significant decline in spot market pricing" and a stronger Canadian dollar that negatively impacted the broader market. Oh, and by the way, they had bought some premium slabs the year before that they had to pay for this year. There is the question of high costs for iron ore and coal and, yes, there was a contribution on energy. If you're going to quote, I think you should do all of the quotes.

1510

Mr. Hampton: I want to tell the Premier that they didn't ask you to do anything about the cost of iron ore; they referred to the cost of electricity.

But it's not just Dofasco. Today, municipal representatives, industry representatives and some worker representatives came from northern Ontario to tell the McGuinty government once again that your electricity policies are putting virtually the whole of northern Ontario's forest sector at stake. Twelve paper and pulp mills are facing possible closure. That's 25,000 jobs in the north and 13,000 jobs in the south.

They're very clear on what the problem is. You're forcing paper mills and pulp mills in Ontario to pay three times what paper and pulp mills pay in other Canadian provinces. They have a simple request: Are you going to develop an electricity policy that is fair and rational for paper mills, pulp mills and sawmills in northern Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I thank the member for his question. We've created 193,000 jobs in this province. We just signed a deal with Manitoba to put in 200 megawatts of new supply, an additional 400 and, ultimately, 1,500 and possibly 3,000; looking at a discussion of an east-west grid; putting in place the necessary energy needs for production in this province that's fair and reliable and stable. For the first time, over \$3 billion has been invested in this sector by energy people. I think that needs to be accounted for. Even Dofasco itself said—guess what?—"In our fourth quarter, earnings will be up."

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Earlier today, you met with a delegation of municipal and business leaders from northern Ontario to discuss the forestry crisis in our province. Like them, I represent a number of communities that have been hit hard by permanent layoffs and indeed are facing the threat of full closure of their forestry operation. Our communities do fear for their future, and understandably, they have turned to us, the provincial government, for help.

Minister, I recognize that you recently announced an incentive package to assist the forestry sector, and I want to thank you for working so hard to put together such a package. But I also know that our mayors and reeves in northwestern Ontario intend to keep this issue on the front burner, and certainly I intend to do exactly the same thing. Can you inform the members of this House what you were able to tell our municipal leaders at their meeting this morning?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I was very pleased to be able to meet with the leaders of northwestern Ontario today, and I'm very happy that the

member was there in support of that. I congratulated them for their continuing campaign in support of the forestry industry that is so important for all of this province, not just northern Ontario.

We certainly talked a little bit about the program, the \$680 million that we've put toward the forestry industry, rebuilding that right across this province, and how that contribution from this government is the largest of any sector of this economy. We're very proud of that.

I also told them, as they were getting ready to go to Ottawa, that that's where they really had to get their message next, because when I announced our phase 2, I said that phase 3 is in Ottawa. The Prime Minister made a commitment in June this year, at the very AGM for those municipal leaders in Kenora. They're going there to make sure that the Prime Minister lives up to his word and makes sure the federal government comes forward and makes that investment in this industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary.

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Minister, certainly I share your hope that the federal government is going to provide significant help to this industry. However, dealing specifically with the province's incentive package, I'd like to know whether you can provide some details as to how these Ontario incentives are being received by industry? Additionally, have you had any specific discussions with industry leaders, and can you let us know whether we can expect any positive announcements?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Over the last three weeks, I have met with all the leaders of all the major companies that invest in Ontario's forestry sector. There is a very positive reaction to our particular plan. They are very excited about the \$350-million loan guarantee program because, as members would know, this industry has been so hard hit, access to capital is difficult. Coming forward with a loan guarantee program for up to 50% of the project cost is a very effective way of promoting the transformation that is required for this industry. Over and above that, the \$150 million that basically is for grants to support this is also very much welcome.

We've had that discussion, and again, I'm in continual contact with the federal government, asking them to come forward. Quite frankly, I'd be very happy if they paralleled our particular plan, because our plan is very well accepted by the industry in this province.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): My question is for the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment. The municipality of West Grey and its mayor have been meeting with your staff for several years now regarding the erosion from the Saugeen River that is threatening its sewage lagoon in the village of Neustadt. You've known about this problem and the threat it poses for downstream towns, especially Walkerton. Your response today was to impose an order and tell

them to take a hike—this despite the fact that it was your ministry that took on the responsibility for the geotechnical study.

You are bailing out on this community and you are bailing out on Walkerton, which is threatened by this disaster. Your response to West Grey and Walkerton is to blame someone else rather than to step up and protect this water source and these people. When is this government going to finally take responsibility for protecting drinking water in this province?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): The member should know—and I thank her for the question—that the sewage lagoon was downloaded to the municipality by the previous government. Your colleague, who is the member, will tell you the sorry state of affairs that resulted from that transfer. What I can tell the House is that the ministry recognizes, obviously, that the riverbank slope instability at the Neustadt sewage lagoon is a concern.

In response, I agree: The ministry funded a geotechnical assessment of the bank slope instability, which concluded that remedial work should be undertaken. On October 19, the ministry issued a provincial officer's order to the municipality of West Grey, and I just want to explain to you what that says: "The order requires the municipality to submit a plan detailing the steps to be taken to prevent the unstable riverbank from adversely affecting the lagoons at the Neustadt sewage works."

Ms. Scott: This is pretty much the response we expected: shifting the responsibility to the municipality here. This government is two years old, and it's certainly acting like it's only two years old. There are water disasters breaking out all over the province. Your standard answer is to blame someone else. Your minister has been informed of this problem by the municipality. The river is the problem. I'll say that again: The river is the problem. It is moving toward the lagoon. The lagoon hasn't budged. You're responsible for surface water and groundwater protection. When are you going to accept responsibility and help the people of Walkerton prevent an impending disaster, or are you waiting for a phone call from Andy Scott, like you did last week?

Mr. Wilkinson: The sewage lagoon is the municipality's, and I remind the member who gave it to the municipality. The second thing is that there is a provincial officer's order. It is legally binding on the municipality, and we expect every individual, every municipality, every industry in this province to abide by legally binding provincial orders.

Finally, I note that both my minister and the previous minister, meeting with West Grey, have urged them to apply for COMRIF funding—a COMRIF program that our government put in—that would provide a third of the money from the feds, a third from the province and a third from the municipalities. Instead, I note that the municipality has not applied. If they did, I'm sure it would be given serious consideration.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto—Danforth): To the Premier: I want to follow up on that. That is my question as well, because it's very worrisome. When drinking water in Ontario is threatened, Liberals have had the habit lately of blaming somebody else. First, your government failed to act on the water crisis in Kashechewan, despite the Ontario Clean Water Agency knowing for two years that the First Nations water was contaminated. Now you've decided to blame the municipality of Neustadt for an eroding sewage lagoon that threatens to dump sewage into the Saugeen River, the source of water for the town of Walkerton. Will your government learn from your past mistakes, rise above this jurisdictional squabbling and take action today to protect the drinking water of Walkerton residents?

1520

The Speaker: Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment.

Mr. Wilkinson: I want to start by assuring the member that we take safe drinking water very, very seriously on this side of the House. We inherited the legacy of Walkerton from the previous government, and we are committed, which is why we're introducing our source water protection act before Christmas.

Now, in regard to this case, it is very important, and I would hope that the member and other members would urge all residents in Ontario, whether it is a municipality, whether it's an industry or whether it's an individual, to respect the legally binding provincial officers' orders that are issued by the Ministry of the Environment. I would assume the member opposite would agree that that is important.

Ms. Churley: I want to come back to the Premier. Premier, I think you and I would both agree that the fundamental, most important issue here is protecting the drinking water for the citizens of Walkerton. Issuing a provincial order, which has been fought in court—and it doesn't matter whether we agree with that or not; they're doing it—is not precautionary and does nothing to safeguard the drinking water of Walkerton today.

The government loves to talk about the importance of water in the abstract but continually falls down when it comes to protecting it on the ground. We just saw that happen. What is it you don't understand about this? We're mentioning "Walkerton" and "water" in the same sentence here. It is a no-brainer. Will you step in today, given the fact that seven people died in Walkerton as a result of tainted water? We cannot play around with this. Will you fix it today and worry about who pays for it later?

Mr. Wilkinson: Yesterday the member said that we should scrap the environmental assessment process in this province. Today she says we should have provincial officers' orders not respected by the people in the province of Ontario.

I say to the member, there is a very simple solution: Like other municipalities, they should apply, in our opin-

ion, to COMRIF. I can assure you that for a project that is subject to a provincial officer's order, that would be given very, very serious consideration by the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. I'm assured of that. I know that the Ministry of the Environment would support that application.

But we do not say in this House—and I'm sure it was the same when the member was in government—that somehow things like the environmental assessment process or provincial officers' orders should be disrespected in this province. It is important that the Ministry of the Environment does what it must do.

There is an instability there. It is the responsibility of the municipality, as downloaded by the previous government. We have issued an order because this is a serious matter. And the drinking water in Walkerton comes from wells, not from the river in question.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. David Orazietti (Sault Ste. Marie): My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. After more than a decade of neglect by the former NDP and Conservative governments, we have introduced initiatives to ensure that the residents of northern Ontario will once again share in the economic prosperity of our province. Minister, in addition to our \$680-million forestry plan announced by our Minister of Natural Resources, could you please tell this House and my constituents what role the northern Ontario heritage fund is playing in improving the economy of the north?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): Thank you very much, Speaker. Before I answer the question, on behalf of all the people who live in northern Ontario, we want to congratulate you and tell you how proud we are as you assume your new duties as Speaker.

Let me say that the member from Sault Ste. Marie is such an ardent advocate for his constituents and for the people of northern Ontario. He was one who was instrumental in ensuring that the commitment that we made to refocus the northern Ontario heritage fund to a fund that targets job creation works.

Since October 2003, I am pleased to say that the northern Ontario heritage fund has invested \$117.3 million, which has generated an additional \$387 million, and this has helped to create 2,721 jobs. Clearly it's working.

Mr. Orazietti: I know that in my community the new programs to refocus the northern Ontario heritage fund are clearly working. Eleven community partners in Sault Ste. Marie received funding through the NOHFC youth intern and co-op program, providing 19 young people with valuable internships at places such as the Sault innovation centre, the economic development corporation and the Group Health Centre.

Under the Conservatives, the number of youth aged 15 to 29 in the north decreased by 13%, while the rest of

Ontario experienced an increase of 2% in the same age group. Minister, how is this new program continuing to work to keep our youth in northern Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Bartolucci: Another part of the northern prosperity plan has been the creation of northern development councils, councils that were cancelled and eliminated by the New Democratic Party when they were in government. We charged them with coming up with strategies that would decrease the youth out-migration. You know what? It is working. The youth internship and co-op program has been very successful. Since its inception in January 2005, at the start of the new mandate, we've created 135 direct jobs throughout northern Ontario through this program, an investment of \$2.2 million, and the good news is only beginning. We will be continuing to make good-news announcements with regard to youth internship and co-op, unlike the New Democratic Party, which created 1,000 unemployed people every week of their mandate in 1995.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Let's get things straight on Neustadt. The Ministry of the Environment has sent the wrong person the order. The order should have gone to the Ministry of Natural Resources. Who owns the river? Who, when you want to do something in that river, must you go to? The Ministry of Natural Resources. It is the river that's moving; the lagoons aren't moving. Minister, will you commit today to repair the bank on the Saugeen River before we have a disaster? That river goes downstream in Walkerton, Hanover, all kinds of municipalities, right through to Southampton. There are lots of fish in that river. Will you fix that river today? Will you commit to doing that?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): First of all, I'm quite flattered by the confidence that the member has in me and my ability to fix this problem. I have to say to the member that I wasn't aware of this problem. It's come to light to me in the House today. I will look into it and see if there's any assistance the Ministry of Natural Resources can provide in this.

Mr. Murdoch: We've heard this rhetoric before. You should have known about this. I don't know where this minister has been, because we have gone to your ministry about this.

Minister, the last time I asked you a question in this House, I didn't get the straight goods, so I'm hoping I'm getting the straight goods today. You said you've committed to looking into this, so you had better do something before the ministry wakes up and sends you the order, because they've sent it to the wrong people. It is not up to the people of Neustadt to fix your river. Your river is what's coming toward the lagoons, and again, I hope you can say today that you will fix this.

Yes, I have confidence. You've got the money. You are the expert on the rivers. It is your job as the Ministry

of Natural Resources to look after rivers. If you can tell me that's different, then you can tell me that today. But Minister, I need you and your ministry to go in there tomorrow and start to look at that river and fix it up before a disaster happens and those lagoons are in your river, killing your fish and hurting people downstream.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I will commit to the member that I will be in contact with our district office this afternoon and get a full report about what is happening with the river. As you know, we have erosion problems, I believe in the clay soils in that area. We do get slumping situations in rivers such as that. I will get a complete report and get back to the member.

IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship. The federal government has announced an increase in immigrants to Canada. Many will be coming to Ontario. But I tell you this: New Canadians and many immigrant advocates are worried. Funding for newcomer services has been flat-lined for many years, while the number of newcomers who have settled in Ontario has increased. Ontario is the only province with no immigration agreement. Why aren't you able to wrangle an immigration agreement from your federal cousins?

1530

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I do appreciate the question from the member for Trinity-Spadina, and I think it's a very serious question for Ontario. The Premier, for over a year, has put fair funding for newcomers to Ontario front and centre in his \$23-billion gap campaign. He has said that it is unfair that a newcomer who goes to Mississauga gets \$819 in support for English training etc., whereas a newcomer who goes to Montreal gets \$3,800. The Premier has said that is unfair.

The Prime Minister listened. In May of this year we got a commitment to have fair funding. That fair funding is coming to Ontario very soon, and we are anxiously waiting for that to happen. We're going to get some good news for newcomers to Ontario so they can reach their potential.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, you have been announcing that we're weeks away from an agreement for nearly two years. Children have learned to walk and talk while we've waited for a few weeks to pass. You used to attack the Tories for not getting an agreement. Now you have a federal Liberal government, you have a Liberal provincial government and you still can't get this deal two years later. You have no plan to help newly arrived immigrants: skilled professionals who come to this province and wind up in menial work, unable to practise their professions. When will you stop saying, "The money is coming soon," and actually produce it?

Hon. Mr. Colle: I haven't been here for two years; I've just been minister for three months. We are very committed and very close to getting that fair funding, and

we'll be the first government to have this agreement for adequate funding for the bridge training and language training we do. That's why, for the first time in the history of this province, we've created a stand-alone, robust ministry that is not just going to talk about immigration and fairness, it's going to do something about it—a lot more than you ever did and those people ever did.

TRAILS

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. As you know, I represent a northern riding, and many of my constituents rely on trails for their businesses and for recreation. There are over 64,000 kilometres of trails in this province, which serve a broad range of users, from hikers to cyclists, cross-country skiers, ATVers and snowmobilers.

On September 30 this year, I had the privilege of attending the grand opening of the Voyageur Multi Use Trail System with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs in Mattawa. This trail system serves over 4,000 ATVs a year. As well, in March, I was also delighted to join with a great many stakeholders in my community to meet with the member for Mississauga South as he did his consultation on trails across the province.

Two weeks ago, you launched the Ontario trails strategy, which begins to address the many issues of this sector. Why were trails not governed by a strategy in the past, and how does the trails strategy fit into your new Ministry of Health Promotion?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to thank the honourable member for Nipissing for the question. The trails strategy was something I was very pleased and proud to release a few weeks ago, but I do have to give credit to my predecessor, the Honourable Jim Bradley, who worked very hard on this strategy.

The trails strategy is an important part of our Active 2010 campaign to get Ontarians physically fit. Sadly, less than 50% of adults in this province are physically fit. The trails strategy also contributes to the tourism economy, particularly of the north—almost \$2 billion to the provincial economy.

We went through an extensive consultation process, led by Mr. Tim Peterson, who did a wonderful job. Mr. Peterson travelled, conducting nine workshops and 14 regional consultations.

In conclusion, I just want to leave—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. I'm sure there will be a supplementary.

Ms. Smith: Minister, I know that this strategy was eagerly awaited by the sector, and I'm wondering if you can elaborate on what the strategy actually proposes to do.

Interjection.

Ms. Smith: I'm sure the member for Niagara Centre would like to know as well.

As you noted, the trail sector is very important to the northern economy, as people stay in our hotels for the

weekends, they stop in our towns and shop, have lunch and buy supplies at our local shops. Minister, how does our government intend to implement the Ontario trail strategy?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I was in the midst of thanking Tim Peterson for the consultations he did.

I also want to make the point that this is not a study that's simply going to collect dust. The McGuinty government has put \$3.5 million into this strategy so that we can do a couple of things. First of all, a proper and thorough mapping of all the trails is important for tourism development in the north and throughout the province; also, a centralized Web site is being developed so tourists and Ontario residents alike can engage in this wonderful physical activity.

Finally, a quote from the chair of the board of directors of Go For Green, Mr. Bjorn Nielsen, who says, "The new Ontario trails strategy, by promoting urban routes and active transportation, in addition to more traditional wilderness trails, can make a significant contribution, improving the health of Ontarians by providing the essential walking and biking infrastructure for active, healthy living in the province."

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. As you know, the forestry industry supports many communities. Today, a delegation of northern mayors visited Queen's Park to attempt to get on your radar. I'd like to commend them for their many efforts to get your government to take action. These mayors are fighting for the very existence of their communities.

Minister, will you agree to implement recommendation number 3 from your Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness report that the province assume 100% of the cost of primary roads and 50% of the cost of secondary roads? Will you do that for the sake of northern communities that depend on the forest industry?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): First of all, as a northerner, I share your concern about the forestry industry in northern Ontario and, of course, across this whole province. It is facing an incredible challenge right now, and the Premier talked about that earlier in question period.

As the member knows, your government and the government previous to you downloaded the cost of constructing and maintaining forest access roads. We have started to reverse that trend and are now contributing \$28 million a year toward the maintenance of our primary access roads in our forests in northern Ontario. I think this is important because, as we know, it's the high cost of delivering the wood to the mills that is really hurting the industry right now, and this is a great contribution to that. I would say to the member also that, in response to the leader's question earlier, I have committed to the industry that I will not raise royalties—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Miller: To the minister: So far, you haven't made significant progress on the made-in-Ontario costs in the forest industry. Delivered wood costs have skyrocketed in the last three years, high energy costs, excessive red tape. CIBC Wood Gundy says that your announcements won't have a meaningful impact on the viability of the industry. Your road funding doesn't even cover fuel cost increases. One company I spoke to spends \$3 million on 1,000 kilometres of primary road, so I don't think the \$28 million announced in your package to cover maintenance on primary roads is going to go very far. The delegation we met with today was talking about \$60 million, or trying to address \$5 per cubic metre US of the delivered wood costs.

Minister, why won't you fund the roads based on the recommendations of the expert council that you appointed? Why won't you go and do that, sir?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: While the member is zeroing in on one particular aspect of the report and our response, which is \$28 million a year over the next five years, I would remind him that we're talking about a \$680-million program to this industry, the largest response this government's ever made to any part of this economy in this province, and we're very proud of that.

1540

I would say again to the member, and put it on the record for sure, that I have committed to the industry not only that we would not raise stumpage fees on wood coming into the mills until we get rid of that international tariff from the United States—the softwood lumber dispute—not only to not imposing any new regulations, but we're going to make sure that MNR—and I've asked our officials to start reducing the red tape in our industry from our ministry so that we can show further savings for delivered wood cost.

SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Premier. Today is Diwali, the largest and most joyous holiday on the Hindu calendar. In a statement I made to the Legislature on October 18, I spoke about the Hindu temple in Hamilton and how it was burned to the ground as a result of a racist attack after 9/11. It's particularly special for the Hindu community to be able to celebrate Diwali in their new temple, but it's too bad they're not getting a response on their request to get some support from your government around the rebuilding of this community centre and temple. What can I tell them about what you are prepared to do, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I thank the member for raising this matter in the House. It was just a horrific thing and such an un-Canadian moment when that happened. What was truly remarkable about it—and I know because I have been to Hamilton and met

with a number of people from all faiths who got together immediately to try and provide assistance to the community and worked together to see the wonderful story that we hear today whereby in fact we have the temple rebuilt.

We need to continue to be vigilant on hate crimes. That's why I've asked members of the member's community, including people who were very active in showing leadership with respect to this particular matter, to join the Hate Crimes Community Working Group to ensure that we not only prevent hate crimes but assist all victims of hate crimes on an ongoing basis.

Ms. Horwath: Hate crimes are certainly an issue, but the issue I'm getting at is that the government had talked about possibly helping out this community. The silver lining in this tragedy is that our local community in the city of Hamilton has pulled together and much has been raised. The problem is, they're still significantly short and they're wanting to know—a simple question, yes or no—is the McGuinty Liberal government prepared to help this community in the rebuilding of their community centre and temple?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I thank the member for her question. Again, we'll continue to work with leaders of that community, to play the appropriate role that the provincial government ought to play, not only the Ministry of the Attorney General but all ministries involved, so that we can make this a moment in our history that we can look back on and say that we all pulled together to assist that community during a very difficult time.

PETITIONS

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my name in full support.

FALLSVIEW CASINO

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I have a petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls signed by many of the residents from my community, including Mary-Anne Kennedy, Jim Hess and June Foxwell. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Falls Management Group made numerous commitments to the city of Niagara Falls when it was awarded the Fallsview Casino contract in 1998" by the previous government.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Niagara Falls residents are still waiting for the on-site amenities and the off-site attractors. We believe that the government of Ontario should ensure that all promises made at the time of the awarding of the contract be fulfilled."

I'm pleased to submit this on behalf of my residents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Petitions? The member for Durham.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you for recognizing me. The member from Burlington will probably be next.

Anyway, from the riding of Durham to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas thousands of Ontario farmers and rural Ontarians have been forced to take their concerns directly to Queen's Park due to a lack of response from the Dalton McGuinty government; and

"Whereas the Rural Revolution believes that rural Ontario is in crisis due to lost property rights and a crushing regulatory burden," and they were demonstrating this spring at Queen's Park;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consider the issue of municipal jurisdiction brought forward by the Rural Revolution's resolutions to respect property and prosperity" rights:

"Resolution number 5: Municipal governments shall be constituted to take control and jurisdiction over matters that pertain to their constituents.

"Resolution number 9: All municipalities forced or coerced into amalgamation shall hold a binding referendum on de-amalgamation at the next general election."

I am very pleased to present this on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislative Assembly about mandatory retirement. It reads as follows:

"Whereas existing legislation in Ontario enforcing mandatory retirement discriminates against healthy and

able Ontario men and women on the basis that they are older than age 65; and

"Whereas the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have ended mandatory retirement in various forms; and

"Whereas ending mandatory retirement will enable many principal family income earners, especially among families of new Canadians and those headed by single mothers, to maintain their careers, earn incomes, support their families and contribute to society; and

"Whereas Ontario faces a labour shortage in the coming years as skilled knowledge workers and tradespeople approach retirement age, and Ontario companies do not wish to lose their investment in the skills and experience of their most senior people;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario should abolish mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario through the swift passage of Bill 211, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code to end mandatory retirement."

I read this petition on behalf of many in Mississauga West. I've affixed my signature, and I'm going to ask page Jasmine to carry it for me.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we are asking for funding for Velcade to be available in Ontario. Ontario is the only province in Canada not currently making funding available for this drug, even though approximately 40% of people diagnosed with multiple myeloma" cancer "in Canada are from Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To push the approval of Velcade through the review process and make funding available for patients in Ontario immediately, as it is in every other province of Canada."

I present this on behalf of my constituent George Petrunas, who has been struggling with this disease for the last 10 years. It has my signature of support, and I'd like to give it to my dear friend Charlie, who will present it to you.

QUEENSWAY CARLETON HOSPITAL

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): I have another petition on the Queensway Carleton Hospital and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Queensway Carleton Hospital is one of the most efficient hospitals in the country;

"Whereas the Queensway Carleton Hospital's priority should be providing excellent patient care, not money for Paul Martin's Liberal government;

"Whereas the number of senior citizens served by the Queensway Carleton Hospital is growing rapidly in the west end of Ottawa and Nepean;

"Whereas the federal Liberal government led by Paul Martin has a surplus potentially as high as \$10 billion;

"Whereas all provincial political parties in Ontario have acknowledged the significant fiscal imbalance;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Ontario Legislature call upon the federal Liberal government to immediately cancel its plans to dramatically increase the rent for the land now being used by the Queensway Carleton Hospital, and that the hospital be charged only \$1 rent per year."

I'm pleased to present another petition signed by me and a lot of constituents from Stittsville and Nepean, and to give it to Adam Rupani, a page from Nepean.

1550

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to submit this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls, signed by a number of people, John Kay and Pat Steeves. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers the treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment cost for this disease is astronomical for most constituents and adds a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should consider covering treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance plan."

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to

address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I have also signed this.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to join with my seatmate the member for Niagara Falls in this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan does not cover the cost of PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

"Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario health insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer and PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance plan. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week's worth of groceries for some individuals."

This is a good petition. I'm pleased to sign it, and I'm also pleased to give it to page Charlie, who is my page for Mississauga West.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by good citizens of Cambridge and the region of Waterloo, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, headed "Save Our Hospital":

"Whereas the \$80-million expansion of Cambridge Memorial Hospital was approved in 2002 pursuant to the mandate of the Health Services Restructuring Commission; and

"Whereas the plans for the project have been in the works for the past two years; and

"Whereas the residents of Cambridge and North Dumfries, the city of Cambridge and the region of Waterloo have contributed their share of the project; and

"Whereas the decision to cancel the expansion will adversely affect and diminish health care in Waterloo region;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Resolved that the McGuinty government reverse its decision to cancel the Cambridge Memorial Hospital expansion and hospital upgrades."

I will sign my name on that petition.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I am pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my constituents for Niagara Falls. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan does not cover the cost of PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

"Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer and PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We support Bill 201. We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance program. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week's worth of groceries for some individuals."

I'm pleased to submit this petition.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Again, I'm pleased to present a petition.

"Whereas many volunteer fire departments in Ontario are strengthened by the service of double-hatter firefighters"—and I know, Mr. Speaker, this will be important to you—"who work as professional, full-time firefighters and also serve as volunteer firefighters on their free time and in their home communities; and

"Whereas the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association has declared their intent to 'phase out' these double-hatter firefighters; and

"Whereas double-hatter firefighters are being threatened by the union leadership and forced to resign as volunteer firefighters or face losing their full-time jobs, and this is weakening volunteer fire departments in Ontario;"—indeed in my riding—"and

"Whereas Waterloo-Wellington MPP Ted Arnott"—the Deputy Chair here—"has introduced Bill 52, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act, that would uphold the right to volunteer and solve this problem concerning public safety in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government express public support for MPP Ted Arnott's Bill 52 and willingness to pass it into law or introduce similar legislation that pro-

tects the right of firefighters to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time."

I support this on behalf of MPP Ted Arnott and present it to Jeffrey, who will bring it to the table. Thank you very much, Jeffrey.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to again support my seatmate the member from Niagara Falls in this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment cost for this disease is astronomical for most constituents and adds a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I'm pleased to add my signature in support of this petition and to ask page Anika to carry it for me. Thank you for the time.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Mrs. Chambers moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I return to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I would like to start by acknowledging the presence of supporters of the proposed bill, Bill 210: Jeanette Lewis, executive director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies; Pat Fenton, executive director of the Adoption Council of Ontario; Kenn Richard, executive director of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. Thank you for being here today.

1600

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services was created just over two years ago, reflecting the importance our government places on the needs of children and youth in this province. Our government has a vision for Ontario's children and youth. It is one of hope, health and opportunity. We are committed to helping ensure that the lives of our children and youth can be as productive and fulfilling as possible. As one of our highest priorities, we have been working to strengthen our child protection system so that it will work better for children and youth.

While we work to achieve this goal year-round, it is particularly timely to be standing before you today, since we marked Child Abuse Awareness Month last month, October, and today marks the beginning of National Adoption Month. These designated months are an opportunity to draw the public's attention to the importance of protecting and helping our most vulnerable children. These children face significant challenges, and we must all recognize that we have a collective responsibility to protect them from harm and to support them as they work to overcome their challenges.

On June 6 this year, my colleague the former Minister of Children and Youth Services introduced legislation that, if passed, will help more children who are crown wards in the care of our children's aid societies find permanent, supportive homes by making adoption more flexible for children and less difficult for appropriate prospective parents. We're also providing more options so that more children will have the opportunity to grow up in a permanent family setting. As well, we are changing the way children's aid societies work by not only making them more stable and sustainable, but also making them more accountable to the children and families they serve, to our community partners and to government.

Since 1994, there has been a 185% increase in the number of investigations conducted by children's aid societies into reports of child abuse and neglect. As troubling as that number sounds on the surface, it signifies—

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This is a very important bill. I notice there's not one cabinet minister joining the minister. I think we've lost quorum in the House.

The Acting Speaker: It's not appropriate to make reference to the absence of any one member, which you didn't do.

Is there a quorum in the House?

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I want to thank the member across the floor for his support.

As troubling as that number sounds on the surface, it signifies a positive shift in our attitudes about child abuse. There was a time when communities turned a blind eye toward what went on in other people's homes

behind closed doors. It was none of their business how other people raised their children. Today, not only is it our business as a society; it is our legal obligation. All citizens, and especially those who work directly with children, have a legal responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse. We have made great strides in protecting the safety and well-being of our children, but we know there is more that can and must be done.

Currently, Ontario's children's aid societies receive almost 160,000 calls reporting child abuse and neglect each year. Consider that these could be children who may be regularly left alone to fend for themselves, or children who defend their mothers against abuse and suffer the consequences, or children who are sexually assaulted by someone they trust and then live in silence, or children whose self-worth is routinely diminished to the extreme by others. In many of the situations where a children's aid society is called, child protection staff can support parents so they are better able to care for their children. Experienced social workers and judges must sometimes make difficult decisions based on what they believe to be in the best interests of the child. The best interests and safety of the child is the driving force behind this legislation and behind all the work we do in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Every one of the proposed reforms we are bringing forward has been considered from the vantage point of the child. Our goal is to help every child in Ontario have the best opportunity to succeed and to reach their own potential.

There are roughly 9,000 children in the permanent care of Ontario's children's aid societies. They live in foster homes or group homes. On average, they change homes every 22 months. They change schools. They have to try and make new friends in a new neighbourhood. A new foster family or group home can mean new rules and new expectations. That kind of instability can affect every part of a child's life: their education, their feeling of self-worth and their ability to form meaningful long-term relationships.

Many of these children are stuck in a system that doesn't work for them. Of the 9,000 children who are crown wards of children's aid societies, we are seeing just over 900 adoptions a year. I think we can do better than that. We must do better than that. That's why our government is changing the child protection system for the better. We need to help more children find a permanent, caring home by making adoption more flexible for individual children and parents.

This legislation would, if passed, modernize the rules around adoption so that they work better for children and families. These proposed changes would remove the rigid restriction that a child must completely sever all ties to his or her birth family before being eligible for adoption. Right now, 75% of children in permanent care cannot be adopted because their birth family has a court-ordered right to contact them.

When judges make an order that a child becomes a ward of the state, they may be hesitant to seal off all contact with the family except in those cases where it's

obviously necessary for the child's safety. So the birth family might have the opportunity to visit the child, say, twice a year. That often makes sense, so that the child doesn't completely lose touch with their birth family. But it should not automatically make the child ineligible to become a permanent member of a new family.

Let me provide a hypothetical example: A five-year-old boy is a crown ward, which means he is in the permanent care of a children's aid society. His mother suffers from mental illness. She loves her son, but she can't provide the care a five-year-old boy requires. When the child is taken into the care of a children's aid society, the judge orders that the boy's mother has the right to visit or contact her son twice a year.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I am sure the members of the assembly would like to know that there are two chiefs from northern Ontario here, Chief Mike Metatawabin from the community of Fort Albany and Chief Leo Friday from the community of Kashechewan. If we would give them applause.

The Acting Speaker: Unfortunately, it's not a point of order, but we do welcome you to the Legislature today.

I would return to the member who has the floor, the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Under the current system, the court order means that the boy cannot be adopted unless that access order is terminated. That means he may continue living in foster care until he is 18 years old. Proposed changes mean the birth mother and adoptive parents would have new options to allow the boy to be adopted into a caring home, while still being able to maintain some contact with his birth mother.

Similar types of open adoptions have been the norm in private adoptions for many years and are always dictated by the best interests of the child.

1610

These proposed changes would mean a child could keep those important ties to their family, community and culture and still be adopted or placed in a permanent home. We know that adoption will help a number of children find a secure, stable family, but we also know it is not the answer for every child. Instead of trying to make the child fit the rules, we're changing the rules to fit the child.

Proposed changes would give children's aid societies more flexibility to meet the unique needs of each child. For some children, it would mean being placed with extended family, people they already know and trust—maybe an aunt and uncle. Under the current system, most children who are removed from their homes are placed in foster or group home care. Under our proposed new system, the children's aid society will have options to place that child with a suitable member of their extended family. Where it's appropriate and in the best interests of the child, this option could mean a child maintains ties to their family and community. It could mean less disruption in the life of a child who has already been through too much.

We know that not all children have a family member who is an appropriate caregiver; however, there is sometimes another adult who can provide a loving, stable home. It could be a child's long-time foster parent. This proposed legislation aims to provide the children in the care of children's aid societies with more stability. That's why we are providing children's aid societies with yet another option: legal custody or guardianship.

Let me provide another hypothetical example. A 15-year-old girl has been in the permanent care of a children's aid society since she was 10 years old. She understands that her parents cannot take care of her and she knows she'll never live with them again, but they are her parents nonetheless and she does not want to be adopted. She has been living in her current foster home with a wonderful, caring family for two years. It's a good situation, but as a foster child, she still receives visits from her social worker at school and at home and lives under the supervision of the children's aid society. This young girl would love to stay with her foster family and, like most other 15-year-old girls, yearns to belong to and be part of a family. But under the current system, this girl has only two options: being adopted or being a foster child. Proposed changes would allow the foster parents to become her legal guardians. The children's aid society may continue to provide some support to the foster family, but the girl could be discharged from the society's care and placed in permanent legal custody of her foster parents.

For this particular 15-year-old girl, it would mean she is given some stability in her life and in her future. She knows where she'll graduate from high school and who will be there sitting in the audience to see her walk across the stage to get her diploma. There is strength in knowing that there is someone who will be there for you. This is what we must work toward for the children in the care of our children's aid societies.

I've said that through this proposed legislation we are providing more options to give our children a stable, permanent home to grow up in. Instead of making a child fit the rules, we're changing the rules to fit the child. We know, for example, that aboriginal children are disproportionately represented in our child protection agencies. This is a trend that cannot continue. We will work closely with our aboriginal partners in the child protection sector to address our shared concerns. Under the current system, aboriginal children who come into the care of a children's aid society are often placed in non-aboriginal foster care, sometimes away from their own community. With an emphasis on customary care, we will work with aboriginal leaders to build capacity so that children can stay in their communities and maintain important cultural and family ties, as well as incorporating First Nations' traditions into their upbringing.

The proposed changes I've discussed here are part of our government's plan to help more children and youth in the care of children's aid societies thrive in a safe, stable and supportive home. We are committed to providing the caring, stable environment that comes from a permanent

home. We are doing this because it is in the best interests of our children.

But that is not all we are doing. We are also removing some of the barriers that often discourage people from adopting children in Ontario. Parents who have tried to adopt a child from a children's aid society will tell you it's a cumbersome, inconsistent process. We know there are prospective parents in Ontario who are eager to open their hearts and their homes to a child who needs their love and attention. Hundreds of parents attend events like the adoption resource exchange which took place in Toronto recently.

The adoption process includes an assessment of a parent's strengths and needs, as well as criminal reference checks. The adoption process also includes a mandatory adoption probation period during which children's aid societies regularly monitor adoptive families before the adoption is finalized.

We are improving the application process so there is a standard, consistent application for both public and private adoptions. This will make the process simpler for those parents who are looking to adopt a child in Ontario, either through a children's aid society or through a private adoption agency.

To ensure that appropriate protection and supports are provided for all children, there will be post-adoption support so that families who adopt a child from a children's aid society aren't left on their own, if they are indeed in need of support, and to ensure that the children we have had responsibility to protect are indeed better off than they were before their adoption.

We will want to make changes to our child protection system which will help more of our children find a permanent, loving home. We know that we can improve their prospects for a productive, healthy and overall successful adulthood by providing them with a loving, stable home in their childhood. We know that without strong support, our children and youth are vulnerable to other risks as they grow up.

But in order for these changes to work, we also need to make some changes to the way our 53 children's aid societies work. That's why we will introduce changes that will make our societies more accountable, more stable and more sustainable, so they will be there for children who need them in years to come, because the protection of our children and youth is our highest possible priority.

The process must always start with a rigorous safety and risk assessment for all children and families. After that initial step, the societies will be better able to match their level of response to the individual needs of the child. Our children's aid societies must be more accountable to the children they serve and to the community. Through Bill 210 and the regulations that will follow, we will strengthen the client complaint mechanism to provide a higher standard of accountability. I would also like to point out that even as Bill 210 is moving through the legislative process, I have asked my ministry to immediately develop a regulation to address situations

where a child may be placed with extended family or a community member. The completion of an appropriate assessment, including background checks, is a critical safeguard in such situations.

As well, to help children's aid societies achieve these goals, we began providing funding under a new model that puts a greater emphasis on the specific results we want to see for children, like more adoptions.

1620

One final legislative change, if passed, should result in more use of collaborative solutions to resolve child protection matters, such as mediation. A number of provinces and states already look beyond the courtroom to settle certain child protection disputes. They use mediation, family conferences and talking circles. Evaluations of these methods consistently show positive results, including more timely resolutions, higher rates of settlement, more satisfied families and better communication between the parties involved. I think it is safe to say that these are all outcomes we would all like to see for the children and youth in our child protection system.

Proposed changes, if passed, would encourage children's aid societies to consider options outside of the courtroom to resolve child protection disputes. We know that options like mediation will not work for every child or in every situation, but if the driving force behind these changes is the best interests of the child, then we need to consider which option will be best for each child in each situation.

Together, these changes will help children's aid societies place more children in an adoptive or otherwise permanent home so they can grow up with the security of a family that will be there for them in the long run.

I'd like to raise one final point about how we are working with children's aid societies to help them provide the best possible service for our vulnerable children.

As part of our reforms, the government is moving forward in developing a comprehensive information system that will be used by children's aid societies across the province. Currently, there is no uniform practice of sharing information.

In the year 2000, a province-wide system was established to allow children's aid societies to find out if families have received child protection services from another children's aid society in another part of the province. Children's aid societies have, since then, set up co-ordinated information-sharing processes. These are important steps, but we need a comprehensive, province-wide information system so workers and children's aid societies can quickly and easily reference information from across Ontario. We are working to develop this system together with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. As well, the ministry is working with the Adoption Council of Ontario to strengthen an adoption-matching database, which will help workers in children's aid societies match available children with prospective parents.

We have seen these types of tools work well in other jurisdictions, and we want to provide our children with the best opportunities for a stable, loving home.

Across Ontario, there are thousands of children who need a permanent family, and a great many families who want to bring a child into their lives. We are working to help bring them together. By making adoption more flexible for children and parents, we believe the result will be more happy childhoods, and more loving, stable, permanent families.

The proposed legislation, along with the other changes we are making, is driven by a commitment to all the children and youth in our child protection system.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Baird: I'm pleased to comment on the speech by the minister. As a former minister of children as well—I often hear that she's the second; she's of course the fourth; I was minister of children's services, and I followed the Honourable Margaret Marland—I think we all want to ensure that we do the very best job we can for children. The need for adoption reform is something that is not new. There has really been a sea change in thinking over the last 10 years resulting from the child mortality task force or just from the various judicial inquiries into child abuse and child neglect and child sexual abuse. I think more can be done.

I think all of us want to ensure that we can make it as easy as possible administratively for families to adopt children. We are consistently moving the yardstick, moving the balance in favour of the children. I think that's something that's tremendously important.

I think all of us in this House—certainly those of us in the opposition—will want to hear from the stakeholders, whether it's folks who have worked in the adoption field, whether it's Jeanette Lewis and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, whether it's talking to families themselves about what this legislation will do and if there are ways to improve it and if there are concerns. This is an incredibly complex area, one with which we want to tread cautiously to ensure that you get it right. I look forward to those public hearings. I look forward to learning what the concerns and suggestions of various stakeholders are. I know we have a terrific wealth of knowledge with us in the gallery, a number of people whom I had the privilege to work with for some three years. We look forward to having that opportunity to get it to committee.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I want to echo the comments of both the minister and the member from Nepean–Carleton and say that this legislation is extremely important. It really will, I think, after all is said and done, make a difference in the lives of children if it's done in a way that is sensitive to their needs and is sensitive to the various communities that have an interest in their children.

On that note, I would agree that the bill is complex. The bill seeks to transform a system that we would all agree needs transformation for the sake of our children and for the sake of their ability to find safe and permanent places to live and to be supported and to grow into contributing and confident young adults.

I'm concerned that when we make the attempts to speak to communities and to speak to stakeholders

around Bill 210 in the hearings process, we make sure that we make the extra effort to particularly get out to some of the more remote First Nations communities. I think we have an obligation there to make sure that the voices are heard from those communities. I've already heard from a few of them who are indicating that they would like to participate in a hearings process around this bill. I know that there are some things that have been shared with the government in the process of the review and perhaps in the process of drafting the bill with some First Nations representatives or some First Nations communities, but we need to make sure that we do that and we do it thoroughly.

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to stand and speak for a few minutes regarding Bill 210, and there are a number of reasons. One is, I've been through the system. I remember my early, early days going through the system as a child, and I realize the importance of this piece of legislation. I'm quite excited about a number of the proposals that we are looking at taking forward, because I do remember the difficult times I had when I was a child.

Today has really been a special day. In addition to this bill, we've passed Bill 183, the adoption bill, which is significant.

On November 24, I'm going to have the opportunity to bring forward a private member's bill—I call it the grandparents' bill—ensuring that grandparents are recognized as a special opportunity for children, where it's appropriate, for them to be accessed or even raised by grandparents. I'm excited about having that opportunity.

In respect to this bill, it's long overdue. Even as a newly elected provincial member of Parliament, I'm quite amazed at the number of people who come into my office. Many times they're unhappy with family and children's services, with the way they feel that the system is working. I have been down, even in my own area, and sat with the agency to understand how it functions. They certainly need additional funding, and I understand that. But they've also told me—just privately when you sit and talk with the staff—there is a need for changes. I've asked them to give me some input about the bill—what do you think?—just a one-to-one, and it's always been positive; they are excited about the changes.

I think this is something that's long overdue. Certainly we're going to have public hearings on it, which is appropriate. I am looking forward, when the bill comes back into the House, to standing here and voting in favour of it. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words.

1630

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It is indeed a pleasure to rise to comment on presentations at the present time on Bill 210. It's also a pleasure because this is obviously a bill where all three parties are united, and they are united for the betterment of those children who happen to be within the care of children's aid, for they

depend upon us lawmakers and upon the good offices of the people that assist them—children's aid and other organizations—for their well-being. They have precious few resources unto themselves; they are not even persons with rights under our laws. So they depend upon us adults for their well-being, and it is a heavy onus.

I note from the briefing notes issued by the ministry the numerous briefings, but I emphasize that I look forward to the opportunity to have individuals and the relevant organizations and caregivers appear before a committee for hearings. I think that is most important when we are dealing with the well-being of our children, and I look forward to those hearings being arranged and carried out.

The Acting Speaker: The Minister of Children and Youth Services has two minutes to reply.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Let me take this opportunity to thank my colleague members in this House from Nepean-Carleton, from Hamilton East, from Niagara Falls and from Cambridge for their thoughtful consideration of this bill.

It's encouraging to know that we are united in understanding and appreciating the importance of strengthening our child protection system. It's encouraging to know that we collectively see this as a very important priority. I commit to you that you will have the opportunity to participate in committee hearings. I am looking forward to hearing more from, and working with, stakeholders and the communities; a member mentioned First Nations communities in particular. It's very important that we get this right.

I have also had the opportunity to speak with young people who, like one of my colleagues, have in fact been through the child protection system and experienced some of the difficulties that quite often occur even before the child is actually brought into the care of the child protection system. The challenges are great, and we are also aware that there are many success stories from this system, very successful outcomes for young people. We want to make sure that that is the norm, and that that is, in fact, the case for all the children for whom we have responsibility.

I thank my colleagues for their comments, and I look forward to further discussion of Bill 210.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I will be sharing my time with the member for Cambridge.

I'm pleased to be able to join the debate on Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. Protecting our children must be the number one priority for any government of any party. We read in the papers and see on television so many cases of children abused or neglected. The children's aid societies and other child welfare agencies need all the support, funding and powers necessary to protect children.

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, in a public survey, found that while 85% of the public would report child abuse, only 46% would report suspected child abuse. Ontarians need to know that they

have an ethical duty, and in many cases a legal duty, to report suspected child abuse. Child protection is not just a job for social workers or police; it is a duty for each and every individual. We all know of horrendous cases of abuse that have taken place in our province. Though I know that no system of protection is foolproof, we must learn from the mistakes made in individual cases to make sure that they never happen again.

The standard refrain we hear when talking about child protection is "the best interests of the child." We all know that this includes protecting children from emotional, sexual or physical abuse. In 2000, we as a government expanded this to include neglect. I think it's important to pause for a moment and recognize how important it was at the time, and still is, to move from the earlier, more narrow definition to include neglect, because of the fact that so often individual cases were clearly neglect but the law did not allow workers to move forward and find methods of protecting children who in some cases were suffering from long-term neglect. So I think it's really an important point to see the progression. Certainly, in looking at the numbers of children in care, it became very obvious that once that particular area of definition was included in the law, it provided people in child protection agencies with the ability to move forward in so many cases.

We must also ensure, in any legislation, that we protect a child's need for stability and certainty. The right of any child to a share of happiness and safety is paramount. We will be closely studying the bill before us today to see if it provides or enhances these standards of protection. The bill we are debating today contains many changes that on first glance appear to be positive for Ontario's children in care. I hope that the positive changes in this bill can be passed without too much delay. But our caucus will want to make sure that the bill will work and that children's interests will be put forward first.

Both my PC caucus colleagues and I will want to hear what child welfare agencies and ordinary Ontarians think of this bill. We look forward to a full process of committee hearings on this bill. We need to hear from the experts. We need to hear from children's aid societies, social workers, foster parents and adoptive parents. Most importantly, we need to hear from children who have grown up in the system. Children and adults who have been crown wards or who have been taken into care are the most important experts whose views must be heard.

1640

The minister in her remarks outlined why the government wants to see this bill passed. I would like to provide a short history, at least from the 10 years I've served in this House, to give some background about the child welfare system.

Between 1991 and 1996, six inquests studied the deaths of 10 children. The inquests highlighted for government that improvements to the child protection system were needed. In 1997, the Ontario Child Mortality Task Force also made detailed suggestions concerning the

tools and resources available to front-line workers, their training and the legislative base for child protection. Following this, our government appointed an expert panel, headed by Judge Mary Jane Hatton. The panel told us there should be a better balance in the legislation between the interests of families and children. The panel recommended we make it clear that the paramount purpose of the act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. The former PC government considered their input and their recommendations very carefully and developed legislation to better protect children. These amendments addressed those changes most urgently needed to ensure the safety of children.

Introduced in 1999, our significant changes to the Child and Family Services Act were proclaimed on March 31, 2000. Our changes made it clear that the paramount purpose of the Child and Family Services Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. Our changes expanded the reasons for finding a child in need of protection. For instance, the word "neglect" was specifically included and the threshold for risk of physical and emotional harm to children was lowered. This has encouraged earlier action to protect children at risk. These changes also allowed evidence of a parent's past conduct toward children to be used in child protection court proceedings.

Our changes clarified the duty of professionals and the public to report that a child is or may be in need of protection, to encourage more reporting of suspected abuse and neglect. Our changes also made it easier for children's aid societies to get the information they need to protect children. Our changes promoted earlier and more decisive planning for children's futures, so that permanent arrangements for children could be achieved as soon as possible. They also ensured that access by relatives or other individuals to children who have been made crown wards is granted only if it is beneficial to the child, and provided for a mandatory review of the Child and Family Services Act at least every five years.

Our government also committed the funds necessary to better protect children. Changing the law is not enough; we must always ensure that the funds and staff are available to protect children. Between 1995 and 2003, we increased funding to children's aid societies to over \$1 billion, an increase of 185% since 1995. Between 1995 and 2003, we hired 1,800 more child protection workers, almost a 69% increase. As of December 31, 2002, approximately 7,700 children's aid society staff had been trained under the Ontario child protection training program. I'm very proud of the changes and improvements that our government made. We made a difference when it came to protecting children. Our legal and funding changes received widespread support among child welfare experts and the media:

Mary McConville, executive director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, said about our legislative changes: "These amendments represent a profound change in child protection legislation, and they

are strongly supported by every children's aid society we represent."

Dr. James Cairns, deputy chief coroner, said: "With these changes, Ontario will take a huge step forward in its fight against child abuse and neglect."

A February 16, 2001, "Thumbs Up" editorial in the London Free Press lauded the PC government's reforms: "Queen's Park's overhaul of child protection laws and its commitment of money to keep kids out of harm's way is winning kudos in surprising areas, such as social services circles: The greater emphasis on protecting children in risky arrangements has meant rising caseloads for children's aid societies. The money is following up—spending in this area has jumped by 100% over the last five years."

Bob Penny, the executive director of the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society, in the Lindsay Daily Post on February 16, 2001, stated what he thought of the PC government's actions: "The province made a commitment to the child welfare system, and I have to give them credit in responding to it. The government's response to child welfare has been incredible. This government has done more than any other government."

It's interesting, when we look at this particular government, that currently there are a couple of blemishes in contrast to the kind of information that we have—I'm sorry. I must go back.

This view of our PC government changes has been sustained over the last five years. A report published by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies just this year strongly supported the 2000 changes: "Amendments to the Child and Family Services Act in March 2000 represented a significant contribution to the enhanced protection of children. The legislative amendments, in combination with the implementation of the Ontario risk assessment model, initiated changes that were broadly welcomed by the child welfare sector. The new provisions lowered the threshold of intervention in terms of neglect and sought to ensure earlier resolutions, particularly for younger children."

I offer these quotes in being able to support the fact that the reforms that we made to better protect children have clearly stood the test of time.

However, as I started to say, when we look at the current government, there are a couple of contrasting messages that they have given with regard to children, and certainly one is reminded of the Premier's campaign promise to the families of autistic children. Of course, what we know is that they promised full autism treatment. The Premier promised the support and treatment children need, and that included children over the age of six. However, this promise was broken and the families then felt forced to take their issue to the courts. The courts now have ruled against the McGuinty government for violating the Education Act by not providing autism treatment beyond age six. Today we find that taxpayer dollars are used now to pay for an appeal in this process.

Ending the clawback of the child tax credit was another McGuinty promise. Again, we know this also has been broken.

1650

Such examples obviously reduce confidence in this government and the kinds of promises they have made in the portfolio for children. I simply point those out as broken promises that perhaps serve as a warning that we need to be sure that when we're looking at this piece of legislation, we're not looking at some changes that will come along later that somehow diminish the value of this initiative.

Today children's aid societies face combined deficits of about \$70 million, with a government that has no plan to deal with this issue.

Bill 210 could perhaps be a way for this government to shine on children's issues, but it's very clear that it must listen to concerns. It must listen to agencies and experts. It must listen to children who have experienced the system.

One of the comments made a few moments ago about the bill by the minister dealt with the issue of increasing the reliance on kinship and community care. I think this is a positive goal. The minister herself gave a couple of examples of the potential that this kind of relationship, this change in the proposed legislation, could make. There's no doubt that in many cases, if a mother or father or both are unable to care for a child, then a grandmother, an aunt, a cousin may be the best one to involve. If we have a parent with a drug addiction, giving custody to a grandparent may allow the child to experience the least possible upheaval. Reliance on the courts may also be reduced if the parent knows his or her child will remain within the family and not be put in a group home or given to a foster parent. We must recognize that extended families already play a great part in raising a child and it only makes sense that we turn to them first in need of care.

The area of kinship care must be guarded rigorously since many abusive or neglectful parents in fact come from families in which these examples have been passed on from one generation to the next. I know that in the area of abuse, one of the chilling statistics about child abuse is the degree to which children who have been abused become, as adults, abusers themselves. I think we have to be very careful in looking at that potential problem.

Nevertheless, kinship care from a loving grandparent or other relative can certainly provide a healthy and familiar environment for a child.

One area of concern that I would also like to see clarified is the definition of a child's "community." The bill states, and I'm looking at subsection 2(3):

"(3) For the purposes of this act, the following persons are members of a child's community:

"1. A person who has ethnic, cultural or religious ties in common with the child or with a parent, sibling or relative of the child.

"2. A person who has a beneficial and meaningful relationship with the child or with a parent, sibling or relative of the child."

In clause 1 of the part I just read, it seems to me that sharing an ethnic, cultural or religious tie with a child or relative is not the same thing as sharing a meaningful relationship. It poses the question of the relationship of the child to be placed with someone who knows nothing of the child or the child's family. The section also contradicts the government's plan for openness agreements. The bill states that openness agreements can be made with, among others, a member of the child's extended family or the community with whom the child has a significant relationship or emotional tie. The government rejected basing law on ethnic or religious principles when it rejected shariah law, but we're establishing the same principles in child protection. Obviously, this is something that needs greater examination.

The minister also made reference to the proposals for alternative dispute resolution. There are a number of opportunities for this, in a very meaningful way, and the minister provided some examples that would certainly be helpful in the process; we have examples in other areas of family law. But again, I would just pose rhetorical questions. The question of the cost of the legal process and going to court is certainly one of the drivers of this bill. One has to ask whether seeking this alternative dispute resolution is going to be more cost-effective and less time-consuming than going to court. There is also a fear that dispute resolution can be seen as simply a precursor to court if the dispute resolution mechanism is deemed unsuccessful in certain types of cases. Again, we need to look at that more carefully.

The third area in the bill that is a departure from what we currently have in the legislation is the question of openness agreements. There's a certain body of information and, certainly, examples where these have worked very well, but we also need to be concerned about whether or not they will impede adoptions because of the fact that one of the stated goals of this proposed legislation by the minister is, of course, to increase the number of adoptions.

1700

The question, then, has to be—and I understand that the legislation offers the openness agreement as an option. I understand that and would make it clear, but I think that certainly, through the public hearing process and expert testimony, as well as through people who have experience, we do need to look at the way openness agreements are done and how they, from time to time, may be an impediment. I think we just have to make sure that those options are understood and that we are going to ensure that the process does what its stated goal is, and that, of course, is to increase the number of adoptions.

The other interesting thing about the openness agreements is that when you look at the part of the bill that deals with them, they are done primarily through the courts. So I would just point out that they revert to a court process. Again I have to say rhetorically, does this create issues around timeliness and cost if openness orders are going to be done by the courts?

I think it's clear that we, as a group of legislators, are very conscious of the need to be able to provide ongoing

support for the agencies that are providing the service and child protection, and we have to be able to find the best methods for children, because the goal is clearly to make a process where a child's life is made better. But I think we have to be extremely careful, in going through this legislative process and the corresponding committee work, to make sure we have heard all there is to hear in order to be able to look at these processes and ensure that not only is there going to be the process that will work in the best interest, but also that we're not going to be looking at the cost being a driver of the whole process.

Obviously, the importance of cost is there. One has to be conscious of finding the most efficient methods. Nothing is wrong with saving money, but cost savings can't be the primary goal in a child protection system. So at every level and step in the process, the government must ensure that cost is not a deciding factor in determining what should happen.

I think the processes that are inherent in this bill have the opportunity to be efficient as well as beneficial to children, but I think we have to make sure we understand that we are first and foremost concerned with protecting children from abuse or neglect. So we, as a caucus, are committed to studying this bill carefully to ensure that it puts the welfare of children first. We want the government to commit to a full set of committee hearings on the bill because, as legislators, we need to hear from agencies, adoptive parents and those who have experienced the system. They are the experts on what is happening with child protection. We want to know what effect the changes in this bill designed to save money will have on child protection. We want an assurance that adoptions will be positively encouraged. We want to make sure that the openness agreements are going to be understood in a way that will not discourage people from adopting.

In closing, I want to reiterate that we stand for the protection of children and we look forward to helping to pass this bill, but only committee hearings will show that those who know and understand the bill are supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker: The member indicated she was sharing her time with the member for Cambridge, and as such, I recognize the member for Cambridge.

Mr. Martiniuk: As I mentioned earlier, it's my pleasure to address Bill 210. It's a bill of some length—50 sections—and amends the Child and Family Services Act. By its workings, it effects amendments to a number of acts: the Children's Law Reform Act, the Child and Family Services Act, the Education Act and the Vital Statistics Act.

I'm not a social worker, although my younger sister—I'll keep her anonymity—fills me in periodically as to the workings of the children's aid that she happens to work with. What struck me was that I can remember as a young lawyer in the olden days doing a little bit of children's aid work, and it seemed to me it was rather simple in those days. It certainly is not simple today. The measure is still the same: the benefit of the children. However, it is complex.

My sister fills me in on a number of problems going on in the field, but there was one story that came to my attention, not through my younger sister but through other avenues, of a seizure—if you want to put it that way—of children from a young couple. The young couple had employment problems. When I give you the background, please, I in no way justify their behaviour. There is no justification for abuse of children under any circumstances. However, one has to look at the environment. For this young couple, the loss of work, money problems, family problems—things all young married couples have on occasion—caused something the neighbours complained about, and the children's aid became involved.

This is a happy story, because this bill deals with stories that, in many ways, are not so happy. This young couple lost their children on a temporary basis, and quite rightly so, and started the long course of rehabilitation. Fortunately, they were taken under wing by a group of young churchgoers who worked very hard with this young couple. I was amazed at the amount of work and love that—it was a project that lasted more than a year, and we're talking about the repair of human beings, of the parents and the other children who were in the care of children's aid.

1710

To make a long story short, there was a happy ending, through a very prolonged number of appearances before judges. The law has become much more complex and our courts have become much more complex. Unfortunately, it is expensive, it is time-consuming and it drains your human energy. If I recall correctly, this young couple had something like six or seven court appearances before the matter was happily resolved to the satisfaction of all.

Primary to the position of children's aid, they are there to protect the children, and they must be conservative and cautious, in my opinion. In my dealings with children's aid in the region of Waterloo, I have been most pleased with the co-operation that I have received. If there have been any problems within the bounds of privacy, which everyone is entitled to, any small problems have been relatively easily resolved. But for the most part, there are no problems. It is an organization that is functioning very well, in my opinion, and under severe duress or stress.

We do know that the children's aids in Ontario carry substantial liabilities or deficits, for the most part. When we were government, an added obligation and duty was placed on children's aid to deal with neglect for the first time, which I am certain has prevented—and that was the intent, rather than proving that actual harm would come to the child. Neglect is a lesser onus, and there's no doubt in my mind that this has saved many children from abuse and, I dare say, unfortunate death.

I have never had a problem with children's aid in our area. I recognize the stress and the workload that they are working under, but they take their obligations and duties to the public in our region seriously—and so they should—and it seems to be working quite satisfactorily, though I must admit I believe they are underfunded at this stage.

Adoptions have always been a problem. Gone are the days where we had orphanages. We use the euphemism of "foster child" but, in effect, they are still, of course, without parents. We have in Ontario approximately 18,000 children in care. The minister mentioned 9,000. The figure I had was that 8,000 of those children are crown wards and approximately 75% of those crown wards have access and, up to now, have been ineligible for adoption.

The total adoptions in 2002 in Ontario: Children's aid adoptions totalled 768, private adoptions totalled 140 and international adoptions were 679. It's interesting, if I just may refer to the international adoptions for the province of Ontario, and I won't go through them all: for Chinese children, the number was 402, and they topped the list of international adoptions by Ontario residents; Haiti had 13; Russia had 54; the US had 22; South Korea, 28; India, 31; the Philippines, 12; and the remainder are of lesser amounts except for Jamaica, which stands out with 31. Those are the totals of the 767 international adoptions in Ontario. That compares with the total for Canada of 2,181 adoptions.

What are we to do with these children who unfortunately are not really eligible for adoption, or many of them are what one terms "high needs"? Individuals would, in many cases, like to expend their love for these children, but they cannot afford the costs of caring for them. This bill is meant to address that, and, though complex, it is there.

One of the little things that is missing—my predecessor Mr. Cameron Jackson, MPP for Burlington, has been asking for an important report that at that time had been addressed and filed with the Honourable Marie Bountrogianni, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, last spring. That was the Bruce Rivers report. Unfortunately, as I understand it, the report has still not been made public. As Mr. Jackson pointed out at that time, it's very difficult to judge this particular reform of an overall program plan and business plan so that we can understand exactly where the changes are going to occur, not just for children's aid societies but for families who are dependent on the government to manage child welfare issues. We do not have that information but, fortunately, we expect, and the minister has indicated, that there should be full hearings on this bill, as it is important, and mostly it's important to the children who are presently not being adopted. They lack the stability of a family. This bill is meant to cure that deficiency, and I hope the minister is right.

It is a complex bill, however, and I can see the hearings taking a considerable length of time. If there are 50 sections to this particular bill, I would imagine that the regulations will exceed the size of this bill by five times, if that's the usual measuring stick. So it will take a long time to ensure that all individuals, organizations and caregivers have an adequate opportunity to come forth and present their views as to the adequacy of this bill.

There is no dissension in this House that I'm aware of. The aim of all members is the same: the betterment of

these children who are under the care of the province of Ontario and the children's aid societies.

1720

One of the concerns, as I mentioned earlier, is the injection of the new rules for neglect, because that has caused a great increase. The number of children's abuse and neglect investigations has more than tripled since 1993. One of the problems I can see is that abuse cases are, of course, immediate. One cannot put them off. You can't put them in the back of your filing cabinet, as we do sometimes in the legal game. That is a priority issue that must be acted on immediately, whereas adoptions can always be put off for a day or two. So we do have a problem and a conflict as to the expediency of the demands of those two avenues.

The number of children in care increased from 10,000 to over 18,000 in the early 1990s, so I think that viewers and members can see that there has been a substantial increase in the occurrences that have to be covered primarily by our children's aids. In the past, from 1995 to 2000, there was an increase of 185% in the budgets, close to \$1 billion being the commitment at that time. Since 1995, more than 1,800 more child protection workers have been hired, and I'm assuming that there have been greater hirings since that date. However, as I mentioned before, my sister keeps me well aware that, notwithstanding the increases in budgets and the increases in the number of social workers and assistants, there is still a great deal of stress and overwork in our children's aids right across this province.

One of the reasons for the injection of neglect, historically, as a measuring stick for actions required for the betterment of children was the number of provincial coroners' inquests launched in 1996. There was a provincial child mortality task force report in 1997 and a minister's panel of experts in 1998. So that's where the revolution, if I may put it that way—it was more than an incremental increase in responsibility; in fact, it was a revolution in the work that was imposed upon our caregivers at the children's aid societies right across this province.

The government did respond with legislative amendments. The new funding framework, mandatory risk tools: I did hear about those at some length and how it does complicate the routine and increase the paperwork of individuals who are working at high speed and having a very important job to do.

Initiated in the year 2002 was a stronger emphasis on outcomes. There was a greater investment in research. We developed a single information system, and more attention was paid to shared services and infrastructure.

At that time, it was encouraged to be less reliant on court intervention. Unfortunately, I question whether that in fact ended up as an outcome, though it was a worthy intention. There was a clearer and stronger connection with children's mental health, a differential approach to intake and assessment and a rethinking of the interjurisdictional review.

Key areas of focus: a differential response; the permanency strategy in the court process. Accountabilities,

again, were linked to outcomes, comprehensive research and evaluation agenda, a single information system and a multi-year funding model.

I mentioned earlier the complication of the system. I was always somewhat dazzled when I was provided with what was headed Pathways to Permanence, which sets out a flow chart of the functions that would take place in the case of a report of a child in need of protection. It seems to go on and on. We start at the top with the report, and of course the referrals could be to admission prevention. But, more likely, the risk cannot be reduced with a child remaining in his own home and then all sorts of things happening, including the court hearings.

This is not an attempt to blame our court system. However, it has become so complex and so expensive that ordinary citizens can no longer enjoy many of the benefits that our court system provides. Our court system is renowned in this world, I think, for its lack of corruption. However, it has become unwieldy. The scheduling process is antiquated. It means that people with great skill—social workers, police officers, lawyers and judges—sit around waiting for a case to come on, when in fact there are eight other cases that could have been scheduled, or a case that is scheduled is adjourned on the courtroom steps, everyone goes home and a courtroom sits empty. This has become the norm.

What it means to us is that as citizens we can't afford to go to court any more. The courts are a primary foundation of our freedoms. I don't think we can rely totally upon elected representatives to protect our freedoms. We look to the courts. If you can't afford it, and if it becomes unaffordable, then you have a severe problem.

More than that, we taxpayers pay to have these highly skilled individuals, who should be doing the good work they were trained to do, sit in a courtroom and wait for a trial or their turn as a witness. On many occasions we're not talking about minutes, we're talking about hours. It's expensive, we pay for it and, most important, because of the delays, justice is not necessarily being done; certainly, justice for those who are unable to help themselves and rely upon us to help them places a higher onus on each of us. We have a problem and it's reflected in greater costs throughout our civil service.

1730

I look forward to an opportunity to attend these committee hearings. I can see, from the list provided as to the preliminary interviews and meetings with multiple organizations throughout the province, that we need a number of days for the hearings alone. In view of the size and complexity of the bill, no doubt clause-by-clause will take a considerable length of time. But it's all worthwhile, because we all are of one mind: the betterment and protection of children within the care of our province. I look forward to that day.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: I appreciate some of the insights and personal experiences that the member, as well as the critic for the opposition, raised in debating this bill. I have to say that I'm looking forward to participating

myself, in a very few minutes, from the New Democratic Party's perspective on Bill 210. We want to raise and flag a number of issues that revolve around some of the specifics in the bill, as well as some things we're concerned about that might be missing, that might need to be looked at a little bit more carefully in terms of some possible amendments and certainly, as I've already mentioned, the issue around consultation. I think everyone would agree—and the bottom line is—that we need to get this right. We don't need to get it right for our own sake; we need to get it right for the sake of the children who will hopefully be affected in a positive way at the end of the day if the time we take is productive and if the goal we keep in mind is their well-being and their ability to have successful adoptions or, in particular, successful movement out of crown wardship. There are many things we need to do in child protection to make sure that the system is able to provide opportunities for children not to be shuffled around and not to be without a warm roof over their heads and a stable place from which to build their futures. I look forward to participating in a few minutes in that regard.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak and say something about this bill. I want commend the minister for bringing in Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. It's long overdue. I think the minister met with and consulted a lot of people across the province of Ontario, and they told her about the problems they are facing in terms of the act.

I had a chance last year to meet with many stakeholders working with children's aid societies, and they told us about the act, and about what's going on in that industry and what's going on in many aspects and details of the bill.

I listened to different speakers who spoke before me, and I don't know their positions—if they're supporting it or not supporting it. I heard them talking about the past government, which allowed children's aid to protect children in this province. But many stakeholders in the children's aid societies told us differently. They told us that the act was old and needed some kind of transformation. That's why the minister is coming up with good ideas to transform the act and make it fit for many people in this province, in order to protect them, in order to create a safe environment for our kids who, for some reason, are not able to live with their family, with their mother and father.

It is a very complex issue, as has been mentioned many different times this afternoon, because we're dealing with a delicate, sensitive issue with very young children who are very sensitive psychologically and emotionally. Therefore, I think it's important to listen, to consult, and to transform the act to fit all people.

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I compliment my colleagues the members for York North and for Cambridge for their erudite comments with respect to this bill, which of course will go to committee.

I know there are some representatives from the children's aid societies here, and I acknowledge the chal-

lenges they face in their work and the work loads they face.

I also acknowledge the work of the previous minister, Minister Bountrogianni, on this portfolio and the current minister, Minister Chambers.

This is a difficult area. We all care about the best interests of the child. We also care about two things I want to talk about. One is the retroactivity of legislation, which concerns me. We had a bill go through third reading today in this House that retroactively affects the commitment by the province of Ontario, by governments of various stripes over many years, with respect to non-disclosure of adoption information. This government went ahead and pushed this bill through with its Liberal majority, which is not right. They also did it with the equity in education tax credit retroactive legislation, and that's simply wrong. It's not right for governments to do that. I mention that here because we are dealing with another bill now that deals with children's rights.

In the bill, it talks about community being defined as "ethnic, cultural or religious." We know the Premier says that we have the rule of law, that the rule is the same for everybody in this province. That was about shariah law. That was the Premier of Ontario. Surely that applies to children's aid issues in this province, that there is only one rule and it is the paramount rule. It's the rule I learned years ago in law school. It's a rule I hope we all share, and that is the best interests of the child. That applies always, in every case in Ontario. It must apply in this bill, and I hope that gets clarified when this bill goes to committee.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): There are two points I want to make. First, in the last number of years—more specifically in the last number of years—we have seen more parents coming to our office to talk to us about the concerns they have from their own personal experiences in trying to adopt crown wards, and how frustrating it has been, how difficult it has been, how time consuming it has been, and in many cases how terribly disappointing and disheartening it has been that they have been unable to do what they wanted, which was to adopt a crown ward, because of the legislation that was in place.

If the government's intention here is very much to try and make that process easier, then that would certainly respond to a number of concerns that have been raised with us in the last four to five years, where we have seen increasing numbers of families coming to us to describe the problems they have had in this regard.

But the point that I think needs to be brought in here is, what is going to be the agencies' capacity to allow that to happen then? I raise that in the context of changes that were made under the former government that really saw a dramatic increase and focus on child protection, where so much time of so many people was spent really taking kids out of homes so that they became the responsibility of the state, with very little support for those families where those children might have been able to stay, and very little support for any kind of adoption of those children.

Our own executive director for our own CAS has told me on more than one occasion that virtually all their staff resources have been tied up in dealing with protection. If we're going to change the law that allows for easier adoption, what is the mechanism by which we're going to have the staff resources in place in the agencies to allow that to happen? I think that's a legitimate concern and it's a question that needs to be raised.

It's very clear that the province is spending much more money right now, more than ever before, on child welfare. I'm not sure how much of that is going to be spent, though, on adoption issues, and we're going to have to have a real realignment of financial resources.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Would the member for Cambridge care to reply?

1740

Mr. Martiniuk: For their comments, I'd like to thank the members for London-Fanshawe, Hamilton East, Whitby-Ajax and Nickel Belt. Perhaps I did not make my position clear: I am wholeheartedly supporting the intent of this bill. I compliment the minister. I think it is the aim of each member of this House that we have no permanent crown wards eventually. That is the best possible outcome that I would enjoy so much. We must, however, ensure that the government's plan, as outlined in Bill 210, will in fact meet that aim, and I'm certain that if we all work toward that end, we can end up with a bill that everybody can be proud of.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: I'm proud to be able to begin the debate on Bill 210 from the perspective of New Democrats. I think it's been said many times already in this evening's discussion that everybody is interested in making sure that these children have a fighting chance at a decent life, and that means a lot of different things need to change in the system. I guess what we are dealing with in Bill 210 is what some of those things are that need to be changed and how we change them in a way that meets the interests of the children, respects the experience of the children and respects their needs and their connections with their community. Those are things that will help them to eventually grow stronger, as opposed to make them feel that they are being ripped out of one place and put in another place and then, unfortunately, another place and another place, which is what's happening in the current system.

In fact, according to government figures, Ontario now has about 9,000 crown wards. Fewer than 10% of these are actually adopted each year. Only 900 were adopted in 2004, and last year, 882 crown wards, less than 10% of the total, were adopted. The remainder of these children, then, are in foster care, they are in group homes and are unfortunately moved around and moved around, in some cases spending an average of 22 months in any single place. How the heck do we expect children to survive, let alone thrive, when they are being bounced around in these kinds of situations? It's just not acceptable.

The problem is that the current rules prevent children in the care of children's aid societies whose birth families

currently have a court-ordered right to visit or contact them from being adopted. So the very system is such that it dissuades, or almost rules out the ability of children to be adopted. Half of the families that in fact have these court-ordered rights to visit or contact don't even visit or contact. The issue becomes, then, that there's a systemic problem Ontario that prevents about three quarters of Ontario's estimated 9,000 crown wards from being adopted.

In fact, statistics from the Adoption Council of Ontario suggest that the number of international adoptions is climbing significantly to something like 600 a year, when we can't even ensure that our children in Ontario are being placed with families. At the same time, we've only been able to adopt out about 170 children to families in the province of Ontario.

While this bill would attempt to address some of these issues, it would also attempt to provide an open system so that birth parents and relatives can, when necessary, when desirable by all parties, maintain contact with the child. There are really interesting ways in which that will be negotiated, and again, that's something that I think we need to look at seriously in terms of the process by which these arrangements are undertaken because we really need to make sure that we're doing the right thing when it comes to the children.

I wanted to spend a very few minutes to talk about what some of the children's aid society voices are saying in this process, because I think it's important. Certainly they have a stake here. They have the experience. They are the ones who, I think other speakers have indicated, are currently struggling under a broken system. They're the ones struggling in their professional and probably their moral hearts, wanting desperately for the system to be fixed, but at the same time recognizing that the resources they have to fix the problem, not only from the perspective of the legislative resources but also the financial resources, simply have not been there. While Bill 210 will look at some of those legislative pieces, we must never take our eye off the ball in terms of what needs to happen from the financial perspective. Certainly New Democrats will be keeping a close eye on how the implementation of the bill, when it eventually gets to that phase, actually meets the needs of the children.

The executive director of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Mary McConvil, said in an interview that only 52 out of 550 children who were crown wards with the agency were adopted last year. In Hamilton, in my own children's aid society, we have an excellent executive director as well, Dominic Verticchio. He says that the Hamilton CAS has 690 children in its care, about half of whom are wards or permanent wards of the crown. He said that 70% of those wards of the crown aren't even available for adoption because of the continued access of their biological parents or the requirement that currently exists in their situation. The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton: About 360 children under the care of the Catholic children's aid society, and 160 of them are permanent wards. Last year, it was only able to finalize 21 adoptions.

That is the system that I think we all agree is in failure. I think we all acknowledge and understand that children in care deserve stable, supportive, loving family arrangements, and anything we can do to make that happen is not only our desire, but in this House it's our obligation to make sure that happens. However, we also have an obligation to ensure that it happens in a way that is transparent, that is accountable, that is responsive to all of the stakeholders involved in the process.

As New Democrats, we on this side of the House are certainly prepared, as we go through this process and, as we go through any changes that come as a result of it, to hold the Ministry of Children and Youth Services accountable to those changes. In fact, the ministry has been criticized very often in the past by the Ombudsman, and has been called the Ministry of I Don't Know. I'm hoping that changes like Bill 210, if we get a bill that we can all support—and we're not sure we are there yet. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that the accountability is in place and that the ministry is committed not only in legislation and in sentiment, but in action, particularly in regard to funding children's aid societies and other children and family services. That certainly is an important piece.

We know that right now children's aid societies are struggling. They are in deficit positions. They need to be sustainable and they need to be accountable, because they need to be there for the children. That's their job. They need to be there for them and we need to make sure that they're able to do that job.

I know that the minister mentioned in her remarks, and it's something that she flagged for us during some of the briefing that we had not too long ago, that in her opinion the bill was lacking around a complaints process. We've certainly flagged that and identified it as well as a problem. We are looking to make sure that there is a fair complaints process for children in care and their families and their caregivers. Again, there has been a commitment to take action on that. We look forward to seeing what that's going to look like because we think it's extremely important, one of those checks and balances that absolutely needs to be in place.

1750

We also had some concerns around the alternative dispute resolution process. We have to be very careful about that. We have to be sure that it is implemented in an appropriate way.

There are so many more things to say about this bill. I wanted to mention a number of other pieces. I think it's a good first step here, but—I can see you're getting ready to get up, Mr. Speaker. Oh, you're not? You're just stretching your legs? OK, good. That gives me a little more opportunity to get a few things on the record before I do run out of time. I keep glancing up at the clock, thinking, "I'm running out of time already."

The review of the Child and Family Services Act that was undertaken is certainly a good step. It was long overdue. We know that it's a requirement. We saw the report that came out of it. But we've also heard from

stakeholders that in the process of the review, many other issues were raised. I probably won't get into that in today's debate, but I do have some further time to do that in the future, and I will be looking forward to just flagging a couple of other issues that are out there that people indicated to me were very important and thought should perhaps be addressed at this opportunity.

When it comes to looking at where New Democrats might want to see some changes, will we be making recommendations not only around this particular bill but also around changes that may in fact hopefully lead to a broader process of the required review as we go forward. We think it's extremely important that we look at the child welfare system from as broad a perspective as possible, and we look forward to making some specific recommendations around that.

Of course, a piece that didn't come up that we were hoping would come up, which was in fact the subject of a media article recently, is the situation of children who age out and what we can do to put the supports in place that make sure—I mean, let's face it. Children who are living within their families are living within their families a lot longer than they used to, and in many cases are living within their family unit until upwards of age 25. They're going through post-secondary education with that support around them and they're achieving things that are extremely difficult. Oftentimes, young people need that support not just financially, but in many other ways, to make sure that they are successful. I'm going to touch on that in a little greater detail, but what is clear is that the results are obvious. Children who age out of the child welfare system have dismal results compared to other children who are not part of the child welfare system.

I know there's an understanding of that in this Legislature and I know that the minister and the ministry are aware of that. I also know that other jurisdictions have taken particular steps to try to reduce the gap, to try to change the unfortunate situation that exists with children who age out of the system. That has to do with many aspects, including covering tuition and increasing the age for which children are able to receive support. There are a number of things that can be implemented that will likely show some positive results with regard to children who age out of the system.

I wanted to spend a few minutes on the process that we're going to undertake for the remainder of the review of this bill. I raise it because it came as a surprise to me that a number of stakeholders were unaware that the bill had been tabled at the beginning of the year for first

reading—not the beginning of the year. I guess it was—I can't even remember—May or June.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: June.

Ms. Horwath: June. So I can only surmise that what happened was that there was a consultation around child welfare—the required consultation that took place. The report was tabled in June 2005. So the review took place and many stakeholders were contacted and participated in that process, but I think, when it came to the actual drafting of the bill, perhaps some of those stakeholders were no longer at the table. I'm hearing from stakeholders that they had no idea the bill had been tabled for first reading, that they haven't even had a chance to look at the bill yet, and, further to that, that there are many concerns people have about having an appropriate voice.

I want to speak particularly to the issue of the First Nations in Ontario, of their interest and concern in having a voice on this bill. I'm going to quote from a document I have from the Anishinabek First Nation. Here is what they say. Here is a quote from a document they produced, and it says:

"The imposition of federal and provincial legislation on First Nations continues to impede the inherent right of First Nation sovereignty and self-determination in the area of child welfare.

"What is required is the recognition of First Nation jurisdiction regarding child welfare and a renewal process whereby First Nation governance deals with child welfare within the Anishinabek territory. Developing First Nation legislation, customary child welfare codes and conducts will ensure the protection of Anishinabe children from being apprehended by mainstream child welfare agencies."

As we go through the process of debating this bill in the next little while here during second reading, and then when we get into the hearings process, New Democrats will be making sure that we urge the government to take this bill to places like Timmins and the communities of James Bay, to make sure that we are not short-changing First Nations and that we are, in a most extremely cautious and appropriate way, engaging them in a dialogue about their children. I think that is an extremely important piece that we cannot in any way miss during the process of continuing the debate on Bill 210.

I know it's that time, and I look forward to finishing my leadoff debate at another time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tonight at 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1757.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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		Scarborough–Rouge River	
		Vacant	

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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Nouvelles écoles à Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
M. Lalonde	586

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2005 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne les fiduciaires, projet de loi 17, <i>M. Klees</i>	
Adoptée.....	588

DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Perspectives économiques	
M. Duncan.....	588
M. Hudak	590
M. Hampton	591

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2005 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne les services à l'enfance et à la famille, projet de loi 210, <i>M^{me} Chambers</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné.....	618

TROISIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2005 sur la divulgation de renseignements sur les adoptions, projet de loi 183, <i>M^{me} Pupatello</i>	
Adoptée.....	592

CONTENTS

Tuesday 1 November 2005

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Government spending	
Mr. O'Toole.....	585
Celebrity Walk and Breakfast	
Mr. Brownell	585
Colleges	
Mr. Jackson.....	585
Mr. Leal	587
Child care	
Ms. Horwath	586
Nouvelles écoles à Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
Mr. Lalonde	586
Optometry services	
Mrs. Witmer.....	586
Veterans	
Mr. Levac.....	586
Hospital services	
Mr. Duguid	587

FIRST READINGS

Trustee Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 17, Mr. Klees	
Agreed to	588
Mr. Klees	588

MOTIONS

House sittings	
Mr. Bradley.....	588
Agreed to	588

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Economic outlook	
Mr. Duncan.....	588
Mr. Hudak.....	590
Mr. Hampton	591

ORAL QUESTIONS

Economic outlook	
Mr. Tory.....	593, 594
Mr. McGuinty	593, 594
Mrs. Dombrowsky	594
Mr. Hampton	595
Mrs. Cansfield	595
First Nations revenue sharing	
Mr. Hampton	595
Mr. Ramsay	596
Provincial deficit	
Mr. Hudak.....	596
Mr. Duncan.....	596

Energy rates

Mr. Hampton	597
Mrs. Cansfield.....	597

Forest industry

Mr. Gravelle	597
Mr. Ramsay	597, 601
Mr. Mauro	598
Mr. Miller.....	601

Water quality

Ms. Scott	598
Mr. Wilkinson	598, 599
Ms. Churley.....	599
Mr. Murdoch	600
Mr. Ramsay	600

Northern economy

Mr. Orazietti.....	599
Mr. Bartolucci	599

Immigrants

Mr. Marchese	600
Mr. Colle	600

Trails

Ms. Smith	601
Mr. Watson.....	601

South Asian community

Ms. Horwath.....	602
Mr. Bryant	602

PETITIONS

Services for the developmentally disabled

Mr. Ouellette	602
Mr. Murdoch	604

Fallsview casino

Mr. Craitor	603
-------------------	-----

Ontario farmers

Mr. O'Toole	603
-------------------	-----

Mandatory retirement

Mr. Delaney.....	603
------------------	-----

Cancer treatment

Mr. Jackson	603
-------------------	-----

Queensway Carleton Hospital

Mr. Baird	603
-----------------	-----

Macular degeneration

Mr. Craitor	604
Mr. Delaney.....	605

Prostate cancer

Mr. Delaney.....	604
Mr. Craitor	605

Hospital funding

Mr. Martiniuk	604
---------------------	-----

Volunteer firefighters

Mr. O'Toole	605
-------------------	-----

SECOND READINGS

Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 210, Mrs. Chambers	
Mrs. Chambers.....	605, 610
Mr. Baird	609
Ms. Horwath	609, 615, 616
Mr. Craitor	609
Mr. Martiniuk	609, 613, 616
Mrs. Munro.....	610
Mr. Ramal.....	615
Mr. Flaherty	615
Ms. Martel	616
Debate deemed adjourned.....	618

THIRD READINGS

Adoption Information Disclosure Act, 2005, Bill 183, Ms. Pupatello	
Agreed to	592

OTHER BUSINESS

Board of Internal Economy	
The Speaker	587
Annual report, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario	
The Speaker	587
Visitors	
The Speaker	588
Mr. McGuinty	592
Use of members' statements	
Mr. Arnott	592
Mrs. Sandals	593

Continued overleaf

No. 13B



Nº 13B

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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 1 November 2005

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TRANSPORTATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE TRANSPORT

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 26, 2005, on the motion for third reading of Bill 169, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters / Projet de loi 169, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et modifiant et abrogeant diverses autres lois à l'égard de questions relatives au transport.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we were last debating this matter, the member for Niagara Centre had the floor. He still has additional time. I recognize the member for Niagara Centre.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you kindly, Speaker. I've only got a few minutes left, the remnant of the one-hour leadoff. It wasn't the lead; it was the effective lead because, of course, Gilles Bisson, the member from Timmins–James Bay, who is the critic in this area, is going to be doing his leadoff, we hope. He may not be able to finish it tonight, but we hope he'll be able to start it.

I know Michael Prue is going to be here. Michael Prue is anxious to speak to this bill, because Michael Prue has been out there standing shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, with taxicab drivers across Toronto, who very legitimately, very rightly, for oh, so many obvious reasons—section 4, schedule A—understand that this government is thumbing its nose at hard-working cab drivers. Cab drivers work at dangerous, hard work—dangerous work. I don't have to tell you; you have to read the newspaper to see what kind of dangerous work cab drivers work at, and you know, there isn't a whole lot of pay there.

These hard-working women and men driving cabs make this city work. And while section 4 of schedule A does quite a number on cab drivers in making sure they don't take fares out of the airport, it leaves the doors wide open to the limousine drivers—the limousine drivers in the Lincoln Town Cars and the Cadillac DeVille sedans and the Mercedes Benz S 500s. This Liberal bill leaves the door wide open to the limousine drivers who

have their trade at the airport—cab drivers understand that—but who then want to scoop fares in downtown Toronto. Do you understand what I'm saying, Mr. Racco?

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): No.

Mr. Kormos: Well, you'd better listen up then, because your constituents are concerned about this. Mr. Racco had better understand exactly what it is this bill does. I'm not going to take him through the whole bill; I'm just going to take him up to section 4 of schedule A. And if Mr. Racco wants to read it with me, he will see that this is a discriminatory, unfair, downright vicious, heavy-handed, ham-fisted—

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): Mean-spirited.

Mr. Kormos: —and as John Baird, soon to be federal Member of Parliament, I presume, says, mean-spirited. All the cab drivers want is fairness. What's wrong with asking for fairness? What's wrong with expecting fairness from any government? Fairness is what they're not getting from the McGuinty Liberals at Queen's Park. Fairness is the last thing on this government's mind. You heard the taxicabs circling Queen's Park, didn't you, Speaker, honking their horns? There were thousands of them, asking for nothing but fairness, the most simple of requests, fairness. New Democrats tried to resolve the problem. We wrote to Mr. Bradley, the government House leader, and said, "Please sever section 4 and, quite frankly section 1, which is a complementary section of schedule A, and Bill 169 could proceed relatively smoothly and promptly"—not hastily, by any stretch of the imagination—"through third reading."

1850

Michael Prue, the NDP member for Beaches–East York, has been fighting like the devil on this one. He's been fighting for cab drivers. He's made it clear that New Democrats can't and won't vote for or support a bill that leaves taxicab drivers to hang out and dry. We proposed solutions, but the government wasn't interested in solutions. The government, rather, wanted to talk about its studded tires for northerners.

Do you know what? I've got to take the government at face value when it says that the new technology of studded tires don't chew up the road.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I don't see that in here.

Mr. Kormos: It's in this bill, Mr. Miller.

My fear is that the studded tires that are being promoted by this bill are going to cause extra and exceptional damage to the roadways in northern Ontario. Look,

I'm not averse to safety anywhere in Ontario, but I say this government had better stand up and make it very clear that should there be excessive road wear in northern Ontario as a result of studded tires, this government is going to help those municipalities pick up the tab for the extra work that's going to be required, which is going to cost the taxpayers of those municipalities.

Quite frankly, if studded snow tires don't cause any damage, why can't folks in Ottawa use them? If studded tires don't cause any damage, like the government says, why can't folks up in Barrie use them?

Mr. Baird: Or Bells Corners. What about Bells Corners?

Mr. Kormos: If studded tires don't cause any damage, why can't the folks out in Ailsa Craig use them? If studded tires don't cause any damage, why can't the folks down in Cooks Mills, where I'm from, use them, never mind Dain City. What's going to happen to the northerner who drives south of whatever boundary there is going to be? It's a problem. If studded tires are good enough for Timmins–James Bay, why aren't they good enough, Mr. Baird says, for Bells Corners and the hard-working women and men who live there?

One suspects that the government has not been entirely forthcoming on this issue; that studded tires are but another political ploy.

Look, the government is reeling today. There isn't a Liberal in this province—in this country—who's thinking straight. Mr. Justice Gomery, in his report, revealed the federal Liberal Party, which most of these Liberals are members of, to be rife with corruption—millions of dollars of taxpayers' money brown-enveloped to friends. Mr. Martin thinks he's curing this cancer by expelling, Soviet-style, 10 members of his party. But, you see, Mr. Martin has only got the surface there; he's scratching away at this scab, and the sickness is far deeper—the rot, the corruption.

You don't rip off millions of dollars like that with but a handful of players. It takes more than a few to handle a heist like that. I say the Adscam kickback scandal—

Mr. Baird: Money laundering.

Mr. Kormos: —money laundering, as Mr. Baird would have it, which has constituted rot in Ottawa—we've only seen but the very surface.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): With Bill 169, I think we're looking at a number of housekeeping amendments that are being made to various traffic acts and the Highway Traffic Act that exists here in Ontario.

In the limited time I have, just to comment briefly, I think one of the key points about this bill that I'm concerned about is the whole issue of traffic calming. People out there who are driving today are a lot different than they were 10, 15 or 20 years ago. We have, this past year alone, more pedestrians killed in the city of Toronto—I don't know what the stats are for the rest of Ontario, but more have been killed than in previous years. I just find that when I get on the road and I'm driving my vehicle,

I've never seen such bad driving habits as are being established now.

One of the things Bill 169 does—and I don't have much time to talk about it—is permit the use of traffic calming in municipalities throughout Ontario. I know that Toronto does it and is doing it more and more by bringing in speed bumps and other ways to calm drivers down. If it takes five more minutes to get to a destination, big deal. At least you'll arrive safely. People seem to get behind a car wheel—some people, anyway—and treat the vehicle almost like a toy, when they're driving something that is a machine that can kill.

Permitting more speed bumps to be put in is a way to deal with this. Traffic-calming measures bring speed limits down to 30 kilometres an hour. I think this is something that is good for everyone in Ontario, those who drive as well as those who potentially may be hit. We had a former minister's father hit by a speeding driver just recently. It was very, very tragic. Drivers are hitting pedestrians, and this bill is starting to address that issue. I appreciate that.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I'm very pleased to speak on Bill 169. Our party supports all of this bill with the exception of section 4. We would like that not to be proclaimed or to stand alone, because we want an even playing field for all taxicab drivers.

Quite frankly, there's been a lack of consultation on this particular section of the bill. It's somewhat similar, with respect to the lack of consultation to Bill 2, the sprinklers bill that we're going to be facing as a private member's bill on Thursday. I've got some letters with respect to the lack of consultation on that from the Barrie Construction Association and Pratt Homes. What they're looking at is increasing the cost of homes by \$3,000 to \$5,000, with no consultation with the building home industry, similar to Bill 169, where there's no consultation with the taxicab drivers, basically putting forth a dictum in terms of what they're supposed to do.

I want at this time to read a letter that I got from Minister Harinder Takhar with respect to transportation in my riding. He says:

"Dear Mr. Tascona:

"Thank you for your letter of August 15, 2005, on behalf of your constituent, Scott Tate, about the status of the extension of GO Transit rail service from Bradford to Barrie, and the concern that there has been a delay by the provincial government in funding this extension. I appreciate the opportunity to provide an update on this project.

"This project is scheduled for completion in the first half of 2007, pending agreement on the city of Barrie's financial contributions. As currently planned, the service would provide three trains in each direction per weekday from Toronto to Barrie. Ministry staff are working with the city of Barrie to finalize the details of its financial contribution to this project.

"Thank you again for bringing this matter to my attention."

I've been working hard on GO Transit.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I just want to say, to the comments of my colleague the member from Niagara: He's bang on. The question one has to ask oneself is, "What is it that this government has against taxis in the province of Ontario?" Now, some people would characterize this as an issue that only affects the Toronto cab industry and the limos out at the Toronto airport. But I've got to tell you, coming from northern Ontario, that there are many communities across this province that are going to be affected by this bill. People are tired, quite frankly, of being scooped by what's going on with airports.

1900

Let me give you an example. What happens at many airports across this province is that the airports, which basically control the land they're on, say, "If you want to come and pick up a fare over here, you've got to pay us some money in the way of a licence in order to have the exclusive right to pick up fares at the airport." So those particular cab organizations in Sudbury, Timmins, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Ottawa and a whole bunch of other places pay a fee to the airport authority in their community, and they have the exclusive right to pick up fares at that airport. The part that is really galling is that once they drop the fare off in the community to which the airport is attached—Timmins, Ottawa, Toronto, whatever it is—you end up with a situation where they drop off the fare and then they can pick up another fare in Toronto or Timmins, bring them back to the airport, and not have to pay the fee to the city of Timmins or the city of Toronto or whoever it might be if they happen to be licensed by the airport authority. That's rather unfair, because there's no reciprocal agreement for taxis going the other way.

Mr. Tascona: They don't do that in Timmins, do they?

Mr. Bisson: It happens in a number of communities.

Mr. Tascona: Do they do that in Timmins?

Mr. Bisson: They do it in a number of communities. We have exclusive contracts at most of the airports across this province. I say to this government, why is it that this government wants to favour the limo association and those who service airports but is not willing to do what's fair to the cabbies across this province? As a former cab driver, I've got to say, this bill really irks me.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): First of all, I want to make sure that the members from Niagara Centre, Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford and Timmins–James Bay really understand why we've got section 4 within Bill 169. It's very clear, if you take the time to look at it decisively and know why it is there. At the present time, anybody who wants to take a taxi cab from the airport could pre-arrange with any taxi cab from Toronto. They will be allowed to pick them up at the airport as long as they pay \$10.

Gentlemen, I just want to make sure you are fully aware that the licenses of those taxi cabs at the airports get issued by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, and the cost of the last license that was sold was \$465,000.

We want to make sure that the tourists coming into Toronto and all over Ontario—this bill does not only apply to Toronto; it applies to the whole province of Ontario—are well covered, that all the taxi cabs have proper insurance and also that they don't get gypped. We know that some people have charged \$180 to get down from the airport to Toronto centre, and others—a member of this Legislature—paid \$80 to get a cab. They were scoopers. We want to eliminate the scoopers. We want to eliminate the cookies standing at the hotels at the present time, making pre-arrangements with all those people.

Studded tires: you don't get this problem in Niagara Centre. The roads in northern Ontario get snow-packed, because there's not enough traffic to get the calcium to work. This is why we are going to allow studded tires in northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre has two minutes to reply if he wishes to do so.

Mr. Kormos: I hope I heard the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell correctly when he said that a member of this Legislative Assembly took an illegal cab and paid \$80.

Mr. Lalonde: He didn't know.

Mr. Kormos: Well, he's the stupidest member this Legislative Assembly has ever seen. I think he should stand up and identify himself so that we can help him in any way possible, so that we can teach him to read the little label on the—I mean, I can't believe it. I understand maybe somebody's been on a plane for first time in their life, they've just arrived in Toronto—like my cousins from Slovakia, from the village—they've come to the airport from that little village in Prešov region, they don't speak English, they've never been outside the country, they've never been in the big city. If they fly into Toronto and they get taken by an illegal cab driver, I understand; but somebody whose constituents have entrusted him with representing that constituency in the province of Ontario is stupid enough to take an illegal cab and then pay \$80? No wonder the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell doesn't want to identify him. This guy probably paid the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell \$80 not to say who he is because he doesn't want his name known. This person is the stupidest MPP who has ever sat in this chamber. Eighty dollars for a ride in an illegal cab from the Toronto airport to downtown Toronto. This member clearly doesn't get out and about very much. I think, rather than discriminating against cab drivers, you ought to sit this member down, Monsieur Lalonde, and explain to him that he shouldn't be getting into unmarked cars that don't have signs on top, that don't have meters, and where the guy wants cash and won't give you a receipt. I feel sorry for this member. I feel even sorrier for his constituents. This guy is as dumb as a bag of hammers.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I've actually been looking forward to this, and I appreciate that the House has set aside the time for the critic's response to Bill 169.

I want to go on the record here a bit and make sure that my remarks are taken in good taste and in all respects are germane to the bill before us, Bill 169.

It's important to put on the record that Bill 169 was first introduced by Norm Sterling as Bill 241. Many of the aspects and sections of the bill are similar to the legislation introduced and the work done by Frank Klees as the Minister of Transportation in our time in government. I do want to respect the minister for taking that up. It may have taken a bit of time to get this thing on the road, so to speak.

I took some time to look into Minister Takhar's background. I would say, respectfully, that I was quite impressed. He was elected in October 2003 and immediately appointed as Minister of Transportation by Dalton McGuinty. Mr. Takhar has held leadership positions with several Canadian companies, including AGRA Industries Ltd., Linear Technology Inc./Gennum Corp. and Timex Canada. But more importantly, he also served as president and CEO of the Chalmers Group of Companies until his election in October 2003. He is a well-respected and highly established business person. I want to start out with the tone to say that I respect the effort he's making here, and for the most part, our leader, John Tory, has said to me that we agree with this bill. There is one very small, rather administrative amendment that we think could be dealt with very expeditiously by just not proclaiming a section of the bill, which has been said.

In my further inquiries, the regard in which he is held in his community is important. The Chalmers Group, headed by Mr. Takhar, was recognized by the Financial Post as a finalist among the top 50 best-managed companies in Canada. The company was also given the Outstanding Business Achievement Award by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in 1999.

I think he understands the importance of—the roadways are the arteries of our economy, and it's important that the minister has a really strong appreciation for that. The mix of transit modes that he has responsibility for in that ministry is important to the economy of Ontario, whether it's northern Ontario or the borders—the gateway issues—or the GTA, where we're suffering a fair amount of gridlock and frustration. The importance of the public safety issue is a paramount theme throughout all of his decisions as minister.

We have no problem with most of the bill, because most of the bill addresses issues that all of us, including our leader, John Tory, would agree with. So I think, respectfully, when someone with business acumen, such as John Tory, and, as I've said, Minister Takhar, they're pretty much singing out of the same hymn book here. There are just a couple of small details, which I'll get into.

As I said, in the last couple of weeks the Minister of Transportation has been the subject of the estimates committee. For the viewers, the estimates committee is really a review of all the program spending by a minister. Today they were doing the Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy, and last week they were doing the Minister of

Transportation. I think the next minister is the Minister of Energy, which would be, probably, an interesting one to attend.

1910

But I should get to the bill. The bill, as I said, was first introduced by our government after extensive consultation with the various stakeholders: the Ontario Safety League, the Ontario Trucking Association, the road builders' associations—and how important these links were to commerce in Ontario. We know that we started down the long road of trying to find the resolve to—the fundamental issue here is getting 85% of the goods produced in Ontario, either in the form of raw materials or finished product, exported.

So it's required that we have really good border interchange for our economy. I can tell you that that work was started in our government and it's still ongoing. It's a tripartite—in fact you could say it's a five-party agreement—on the border issues at Windsor. You've got the US government, the city of Detroit and the state of Michigan. You've also got the city of Windsor. You've also got the regional authority there. You've got the province and you've got the federal government. You have a lot of responsibilities here for the process for linkage with our neighbours in the United States. It's probably a lot of red tape and really causing lot of waste in our economy. Each delay there is costing jobs. I would urge the minister—the general thrust of the Minister of Transportation is to get the border solved.

We could deal with some of the commodities at the border, one of which is the auto sector, which is so dependent on that gateway with the just-in-time environment. The auto sector and many of the ancillary supply-side issues in the auto sector are very much transport-truck-based. Those border issues for component parts, as well as finished products, are absolutely critical.

I do want to say right from outset that Bill 169, which I've had the pleasure to go through in some detail probably a couple of times—I can't find an awful lot that I disagree with. And I'm not just filling time here. I think it's important to put concisely and politely on the record a couple of the concerns, and as critic it is my role to listen, to bring to the minister's attention concerns. We'd like very much to support it because it is about road safety and the economy of Ontario. John Tory has made that eminently clear to caucus just this morning when we reviewed our position on this legislation.

The two parts of the bill that I want to get to, and now I'm going to move into a bit more detail—some of the people I see may wish to go on with other business. But for the record, it's my requirement, in response to the bill here, to put the issues that we see as somewhat in question. I'll mention names and give credit to persons who have made a contribution to these issues.

The first one would be the airport limousine drivers and the taxi drivers—a long-standing issue. There was interference by government some time ago where they took it upon themselves to make it what I would call illegal for taxi drivers to pick up fares at the airport.

Now, let's roll out for the ordinary person, the average citizen of Ontario or Toronto, or some parts of Ontario, that they're actually going to the airport with a fare in a taxi, and the taxi driver has to leave the airport empty. It's illegal for them—some of them are licensed through the city of Mississauga, because part of the airport is actually in Peel region, the city of Mississauga. Part of it's in Toronto as well. So there's a licensing issue; in fact, the licences are issued by the municipality, not the province.

You see that this argument's been sort of phrased or captioned by the term "the scooper bill" or "the level playing field." Here's the other part of it: The limousine driver sits at the airport waiting to be of service to people coming into Ontario or Toronto, or wherever, for that matter. They arrive in Toronto; the limousine is there to take them, often for a prearranged fee, a certain amount of money, to a hotel where they've made their reservation for the first night to start their tour. Welcome to Ontario. I think it's absolutely critical that they have classy vehicles and well-trained, professional drivers. They can drive to Toronto, to the Hilton or wherever they're going.

Mr. Baird: Holiday Inn.

Mr. O'Toole: The Holiday Inn. Best Western is usually where I stay. You know: modest person, modest income.

The real story here is that the limousine driver is allowed to pick up a return fare. Often, money changes hands to the maître d' or the bellhop or whatever they call them at the various hotels; they may get a bit of money to get a return fare to the airport. So you have the limousine able to deliver from the airport and back to the airport from the hotel. But who is to say that the person they pick up is actually going to the airport? They're probably going to—

Mr. Bisson: John, are you taking the whole time on this?

Mr. O'Toole: We have quite a bit to say on this. For viewers who want to record this, you'll need an hour's tape.

To be serious, that fare could be dropped off at Yorkdale or could be dropped off anywhere in the city of Toronto, which then would arguably be replacing the normal taxi driver, who pays for a licence and abides by the rules. What the taxi industry has said to me is that it's not a level playing field.

I do want to put on the record—and this is where it's very important for me to have notes handy that I can actually read. On the taxi issue, I met with Hillel Gudes, Andy Réti and Gerry Manley. They're representing the Toronto Taxi Drivers Association. All they want is a level playing field; that is, that the taxi can deliver to the airport and make a return trip back to a hotel or to Yorkdale or wherever a person may want to go. It seems to be environmentally friendly; it seems to be a level playing field, because at the moment the limousine driver can actually deliver from the airport to some destination

downtown and return a fare to some other place in Toronto. That's all this is about.

In the committee hearings on Bill 169, which I attended, I moved an amendment. I want that amendment to be put on the record again now, because this is where we got into some difficulty. Our position, with John Tory, caucusing on this several times, was that we wanted to find a way we could go forward, working co-operatively, sort of hand in hand, if you will—not exactly that way, but certainly working co-operatively—to move this bill forward. We had spent considerable time consulting with the various sectors, as I said, and the right thing to do, I think, politely and respectfully, with the minister being fairly new on the job—we moved an amendment, and I'm going to read the amendment. I moved that section 32 of schedule A of the bill be amended by adding the following section—this is really the essential part of our argument on a very compatible bill:

"(3) A proclamation shall not be issued in respect of sections 1 and 4 until after legislation is enacted respecting the operation of taxis at airports,

"(a) as an amendment to the Municipal Act, 2001 that incorporates the terms of an agreement among the affected municipalities and the associations that represent taxi operators; or

"(b) as an act respecting the city of Toronto that incorporates the terms of an agreement between the city of Toronto and the associations that represent taxi operators."

All I can say is that this motion was debated in committee. In fact, one of the committee members, Mr. Duguid; whose riding, I believe, is Scarborough—just a minute; where is Mr. Duguid sitting now? They've changed the seating plan on me.

Mr. Baird: Scarborough Centre.

1920

Mr. O'Toole: Scarborough Centre, yes. Pardon me. Thank you, to the member from Nepean, who has an illustrious future ahead of him.

If you look up Hansard, he said that, yes, they kind of tacitly agreed that much of this could be dealt with under the Municipal Act. I'm actually speaking to my constituents and the people of Ontario, because I know many people in here know that there are discussions between Mr. Gerretsen, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the city of Toronto, David Miller, on a new City of Toronto Act. It's probably long overdue, and I would say that perhaps Barbara Hall will serve a role there in her new job.

But that is a very good point for me to establish a very important piece of evidence. I'm looking at a letter here, and it's from David Miller, the mayor of Toronto. It says, "I am writing to express city council's"—that's the city of Toronto—"position on Bill 169 with respect to 'scooping' taxi fares. At its meeting on May 17-19, 2005, council adopted Planning and Transportation Report 4, clause 3, which included the following motion by Councillor Howard Moscoe:

"...The city indicate its opposition to Bill 169 as it pertains to "scooping" fares at the airport, unless it is

amended to remove the exemption that permits airport licensed vehicles from “scooping” fares within the city of Toronto, and the Minister of Transportation and opposition critics be so advised....”

Mayor Miller’s signature says, “I support council’s position on this matter.”

He is really saying that the city of Toronto, which is a large, complex, sophisticated city, is prepared to take this on under the new City of Toronto Act.

We also know that there are discussions, or at least the House leaders are discussing, the possibility of amending the Municipal Act generally, which would allow autonomy in many forms to deal with this problem under the Municipal Act. That’s basically what Brad Duguid, the member from Scarborough Centre, said in committee. He more or less tacitly agreed with the amendment we moved that that section of Bill 169, section 4, not be proclaimed until such time as the Municipal Act has been dealt with—not an unreasonable request. I put that formally on the table tonight.

Our position on this bill is that we do want to support it, and we probably support 95% of the bill. There are two little sections—the one I just mentioned, section 4, dealing with the taxi issue, where we are strongly in favour of the cities and the municipal regional levels of government dealing with this issue. I can tell you that some of the airports, like Hamilton or Windsor or London or Ottawa, have unique circumstances where they have too many or too few limousines and they might want to have the flexibility to move to a different approach or resolve to the issue.

That’s about accountability and transparency, and I think Minister Takhar, with his knowledge of and background in business, would realize that would be just smart business. He would have won the day with David Miller. He would have set a precedent of the government’s willingness to let democracy work. We have the mayor of Toronto saying that’s a solution. So I encourage him on the record here tonight to do the right thing, and you’ll find that John Tory is one who wants to work and move forward together when we’re trying to do the right thing. That is the first issue that I wanted to bring to the viewers’ attention and to put on the record.

The second issue is not quite as well debated and understood, but I would say our position on the second issue—that’s the issue raised by the driving school associations. This is a bit more difficult to explain on my feet here without notes, so I’m going to refer to the Hansard discussion during the hearings on Bill 169. I’m going to refer to two individuals who are quite experienced in this area of the self-regulating organization of the driving schools.

What do the driving schools and licensed instructors have to do with this bill? There’s a section in this bill that prescribes how a student taking driving school lessons and course work dealing with Highway Traffic Act passes and conforms with that before they go and take their practical exam with the Ministry of Transportation offices. There seems to be a suggestion that there is

inconsistency between certain driving schools, for a variety of reasons. I don’t necessarily want to go there

It’s important to put on the record here that, as I said earlier, the economy is dependent on having an effective, efficient, well-maintained transportation infrastructure, everything from ferry service between islands, like in Kingston, for instance; transit systems, whether it’s GO Transit or public municipal transit like the TTC; some airports, which are controlled, funded and maintained through licensing, permits and fees by the province and are important to the local economy—and northern Ontario might be one example—and I would say highways, which are the ribbon of economy.

The second part is the driving licence and auto insurance issue. It has been recognized for quite a few years here that if you take driving instructions and courses for safe driving, you will receive an insurance reduction. I think it’s about 10% off your premium if you’ve taken driver ed, as they call it. Sometimes the certificate they get to turn in to the insurance company is issued by the driving school, and that certificate entitles you to a premium reduction, which is important because auto insurance is very expensive. Governments right from the NDP have been struggling with it, and certainly you’re struggling with it now, as I see you’re going to be closing the designated assessment centres which deal with injuries and accidents.

The point I’m making here is that the Driving School Association of Ontario was set up in, I believe, 1991, as far as my notes here go. There were two presenters at the committee. One was a fellow named Bob Lewis from North Bay:

“I’ve had a driving instructor’s licence since 1973. I’m presently a member of the Road Safety Educators’ Association, the Canadian Association of Road Safety Professionals and the Ontario Safety League. You have my presentation there, and I’m just going to skip over some parts of it,” and make a few points.

“Keith Wallace, who was one of the best-qualified driving educators in Ontario at that time, indicated in 1978 that the driver training industry had gone backward in the last 18 years. So it was 18 years behind in 1978. Also at that time, the Ontario Safety League”—and this is the issue I’m trying to establish here; it’s a little more complicated than the scooping issue—“was severely criticized for the standards that it set for approving driving schools.”

So there was a set of standards, and the ministry took over and set standards for qualifications for instructors and to issue these certificates. I’m still quoting from Bob Lewis:

“So where are we now? One of the organizations named above refused to co-operate with the plans to regulate, and it now no longer exists. The DSAO,” the Driving School Association of Ontario, “which was the only provincial organization that has tried to introduce standards of behaviour for driving schools and encourage professional development for all instructors, has been emasculated since 1998, when the Minister of Trans-

portation and the government of the day unilaterally changed the rules and procedures." The Ontario Safety League, "for no reason that was apparent at the time, was given the functions of certificate distribution and audit, previously carried out by DSAO."

The DSAO made a presentation as well, and I just want to put that on the record here, because there was some question. This was put on the record by John Svensson:

"In response to challenges from the government, going back as far as 1985—I won't go back to 1978 when another bill came forward for self-regulation, but in response to challenges the government put to us in 1985—we undertook a path for industry self-regulation. By 1994, 100% of all of the driving schools offering formal driver education programs in their communities were part of the DSAO-approved school system."

1930

It worked quite well, and for some reason or other—there's a large question that needs to be examined by the minister and staff to ensure—I know they've made minor changes recently and taken the Ontario Safety League, who did these audits of compliance of the driving schools that were issuing the certificates, and they've given it to independent, arm's-length audit groups.

I recently asked the minister a few questions in estimates on the transparency and accountability of this process.

It's a bit technical, but what I'm saying is that this was an issue in the paper this very day. I could quote that for you, and I will, because I'm going to make that quote later on. I am saying now that there is a newspaper article talking about the safety on our roads. It could be coined under lots of different phrases, but I think it's just a lack of familiarity and a lack of rigour in acquiring a driver's licence. We should always remember that a driver's licence, whatever type—I'm talking primarily about a G licence—is a privilege, not a right.

Some of the attention in the courts and some of these judgments or decisions are set aside because the courts are kind of backlogged, but it goes back to what the driving school certification process is trying to do: standardize a very high level of expectation in the curriculum; audit that and verify that by the Driving School Association of Ontario—that has been taken over a bit by the Ontario Safety League, is the information I've been given by the presenters I just mentioned, Mr. Svensson as well as Mr. Lewis, with many years of experience. The Ontario Safety League basically took their computer system, their certificates and the auditing system from them. They've been struggling to get it back. There's more to that story; some of it's speculation. I just think there needs to be an organization.

I asked the minister a question: "How much money do you get for each one of these certificates?" Because I read in an article that these insurance certificates were virtually being sold with no course required. What they were saying to me is that the certificates were being given out by the ministry to the driving schools, and

every time they issued one, the Ministry of Transportation would get, I believe it's \$4.50. These certificates were being sold to people who may have been in need of getting their licences. You can use that the way you wish. They'd have to be able to drive, obviously, because they'd have to go and pass a driving exam. The certificate would be as if they'd had driver's education, and it would give them a discount on their insurance. That was the accusation being made: that this process was somewhat flawed; that they were printing these certificates on laser printers and selling them for 50 bucks.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada, Mark Yakabuski, did appear before the committee. They need to make sure that there are standards in driver education.

I feel confident that the minister wants to have a professional climate for driver ed and driver certification processes. We all want to have safe driving. There are two issues that I've raised, one being the taxi industry issue and the other being the driving school issue.

With that, as I said before, we've offered an amendment where the minister would simply not proclaim—I believe if he gave John Tory, our leader, his word that he would not proclaim that section until they had resolved the taxi issue under the Municipal Act or the City of Toronto Act, tomorrow or the next day—whenever we vote on Bill 169—our caucus and our leader, John Tory, would be supporting Bill 169.

Failing to do that, we have to make sure that, under the definition, as Premier McGuinty says, there is transparency and accountability. We need to do the right thing. We need to not just slip over or ignore these unresolved issues of fairness.

I believe that our position isn't really earth-shattering; it's simply doing the right thing. That's the point I'm trying to make at some length, and I'm trying to do it politely. In fact, I'm confident that it's non-partisan when I see Mayor David Miller's signature on recommending roughly the same suggestion, that they can deal with this under the Municipal Act.

I just want to move to a couple of other points, since I've solved our problem on Bill 169. I want to go back to the estimates process because, as I did compliment the minister in my remarks, he's trying to do the right thing.

You know, I represent the riding of Durham. It's in Durham region, obviously, and it's part of the city of Oshawa, as well as Scugog township—a wonderful, beautiful area of Lake Scugog—as well as Port Perry, which is a great destination for anyone, and Clarington. The three mayors there—I work very well with John Mutton and Marilyn Pearce from Scugog, and certainly with John Gray from the city of Oshawa. I, of course, worked in the auto sector for many years. So I think it's important to respect the importance of the economy.

I'm getting back to the broader discussion of the mandate the Minister of Transportation has. I just recently made presentations, as I do annually for sure, maybe semi-annually: I appear before the mayors that I work with and the regional chair, Roger Anderson. It is my job to represent their interests, certainly to listen to them and

indeed support them, if not initially question them. In those presentations, I've asked them what their top issues are, and I've got quite a little list. In fact, I can tell you that I have a number of issues that I want to put on the table here that I've raised with the minister.

Do you know what the number-one issue was, Mr. Speaker? I'm just wondering. Mr. Speaker, I was just wondering if you were interested in the top issues in my riding, and probably in all of Durham region. It was the completion of Highway 407. It's important to the city of Kawartha Lakes; it's important to the city of Peterborough; it's important to Windsor, actually, because the Windsor area and the border area is a huge issue. The Minister of Transportation—now we're getting into what I'd call really sensitive areas of where you've got to deliver. I don't mean that in any way to be a threat. It's just linking the importance of the Ministry of Transportation's Bill 169 and those functions with respect to—

Mr. Speaker, I think somebody's on the floor of the House.

The Acting Speaker: I apologize to the member for Durham. He still has the floor.

Mr. O'Toole: Yes, thank you very much. Holy—what do Batman and Robin say? Holy—whatever it is. I forget what they say. Anyway, I hope he brought his Batmobile, because it is transportation. Holy—what is it?

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Holy taxi, Batman.

Mr. O'Toole: Holy taxi, Batman. Yes, exactly.

The number-one issue certainly in our area was the 407 completion. Now, I put to the minister in estimates—you can look this up in the Hansard copy of estimates from last week. I quite humbly said to the minister, "Are you sure that your election promise to roll back the tolls on the 407—and now you're in court with the 407 group. Are you sure that you are not going forward with the 407 completion because you're in court with the very operators of the system? So why would you sign an agreement with the operators of the 407 until you've resolved this election promise?"

1940

I'm not talking about the broken promise and all that rhetoric we use in here. I think it's a serious question. It actually has legal legs in terms of precedents and ministerial responsibility to contract with an operator with whom he is in court. But what we want is some certainty for our economy and our opportunity—equal opportunity in Durham region and eastward destinations—to get on with the job of the 407. In fact, Durham region council and Chair Roger Anderson, who is also the chair of AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, also have a resolution on the record, which I read into Hansard in the estimates committee, insisting that the minister get on and stop using the environmental assessment as a delay for the completion of the 407.

In the provincial sense, I met with the chambers of commerce. Do you want to know what the chamber of commerce felt was the most important issue? It was the border issue at Windsor, to allow our goods and services and our produce and our hard manufacturing, as well as

resources, to get across the borders. This border issue has to be ramped up, because it is going to become a barrier to opportunities for our youth and for our economy.

We know from today's economic statement that the economy is at some risk; in fact, they said there is a bit of a shadow. I don't want to go down a road of hyper-criticism. I'm pointing up in a helpful way two recent observations that I have heard from municipally elected leaders. I'm communicating that, as is my duty, and how it applies to our opportunity not just in Durham region but indeed across the province. So I do leave that on the record as an important thing for Minister Takhar to work on, and I suspect—I can say it here. I know I listen to our leader, John Tory, who fundamentally believes that a strong economy will allow the government to enhance the programs we offer, and we've all established that part of that strong economy is the infrastructure that we're talking about, mainly our roads, highways and bridges etc. that come under the direct responsibility of the Minister of Transportation.

But I also said that there were a few other small, minor things that for the public who may still be listening—some of them may have videotaped it, and hopefully have, because I would like perhaps to get a copy of it. But one of them was in some of our connecting roads, our links.

On the 407, I have raised two issues in Durham that need to be resolved before they can move forward to build the links from the 407 down to the 401. One of them is the Lakeridge Road connection. That has to be resolved. There's no real link from the 407 as it heads eastward toward the 35/115 highway until you get past Oshawa. I'm looking at the member for Northumberland, because Mr. Rinaldi, as a former mayor, would know how important that is to his community, to get that economy moving across Toronto through the GTA. We're all dependent on it, Mr. Rinaldi. I would say we're working together here.

Well, there is no link until you actually get past Oshawa, and it is in the area of Courtice Road. The initial study was done when I was a regional councillor—before I was a councillor. In the early 1990s, there was a 407 environmental assessment done eastward right to 35/115. I'm told by the ministry that this EA was never filed with the Ministry of the Environment, but there was a lot of work done. They developed what they called the technically preferred route. That technically preferred route is still showing on the official plan of Durham region. And here we are, let's say from 1990 to 2005; we're talking over 15 years that this thing's been talked about, and probably five years before that.

This is a barrier, and those are two issues that should be worked on as we speak: the links with the eastern portion of the 407 highway. One would be the Lakeridge Road link and the other one would be the Hancock Road link, and I would think it probably should be somewhere between Hancock and Holt Road. I say that because I do listen to my constituents about how important it is.

There are other issues that may not relate just exactly to the 407, but, as I said before, I know the city of Peterborough has a resolution on it. In those meetings I've had with the public, I heard quite a bit, actually, in terms of some of the priorities locally. And—surprise, surprise—I've had a lot of e-mails.

I have a bill that may come before this House before Christmas. It's Bill 137, and it's really to the Minister of Finance, but it works directly with the Minister of Transportation. I would gladly give the legislation and deny any ownership of it, because it is just good public policy. Bill 137—Mr. Speaker, you may be interested in this—provides a transit tax credit. There would be a tax deduction for all receiptable expenses for use of public transit.

Now, why did I come up with this idea? I didn't. I was on the GO train with one of my constituents. He found out I was a member and we got talking. He said to me, "Do you realize it costs me \$70 a week for a GO pass to take the GO train to Union Station? It costs me another \$5 a day to go up north of Bloor street." He works north of Bloor Street. It's costing him \$100-plus a week, and his wife. They're doing the right thing, they're using public transit, and they're spending \$100 or \$200 a week. For a young person with a young family, that's \$5,000 a year, after tax. That's like \$10,000 it's costing them, and at the same time they're doing the right thing. They're not polluting; they're not in gridlock; they're not idling their cars.

I'm asking the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Transportation to adopt my Bill 137 and modify it in any way they wish. They could implement it over a period of years. It could be set by regulation. They could give a 5% tax credit the first year, 10%, whatever, and they could phase it in over time. It will help gridlock, it will help the environment, and it will improve everyone's quality of life. Just think about it. It isn't going to cost that much, because if we don't get cars off the road, it's costing the economy billions of dollars. So there is one small bill and one example of trying to work co-operatively with the government to do the right thing and to implement the right policies, and I offer this tonight to Minister Takhar. I don't need my name mentioned—perhaps the name of my constituent who gave me the idea—but I'd like to see him implement that, because it's simply good politics, it's good policy and I think it's the right thing to do. I would be the first one to be there taking his picture at the photo op—not being in the picture, if you know what I mean. That's kind of a selfish thing, but we're all trying to work—our leader, John Tory, is big on urban issues. He's big on public transit as part of the solution. There's no one-size-fits-all in these suggestions.

We see the transit strategy. Now we're getting into a bit more sophisticated language. The strategy we've tried to develop, in the very few minutes I've had so far, is to stress the importance of the economy and its link to infrastructure, that is, our transportation infrastructure. We all agree on that. We've offered minor solutions. The completion of the 407 would be one of those. Increased public transit would be another part of it, through the tax

mechanism. We've got to create the opportunity and the incentive to get people to make that choice, to stop for a moment and just say, "I'm not going to be in gridlock any more. I'm going to use public transit." I put it to you that when they buy that first pass for a month, they'll be hooked. It's more relaxing, more convenient and generally on time and on schedule. We just need to make it on budget for young families.

The other one I'm suggesting is on the taxi issue: giving the autonomy back to the municipal level of government to make the rules that suit them on issues that are relevant to their economy, and whether it's tourism or the hospitality sector, making it work more effectively. They license them. Let them regulate them and let's get over this squabble with airport limousines. The member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell said earlier that somebody got nicked for \$80 dollars by someone who was inappropriately licensed and doing the wrong thing.

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I've been holding gridlock meetings across the province, and quite successfully. I know your riding has had them as well, Mr. Speaker. These aren't partisan. We've basically had boards of trade, chambers of commerce, trucking associations, home builders, senior citizens, retired persons, students—students wanting to get to York University. I've been very impressed with the input we've had.

We're developing, on behalf of John Tory, what I call some refreshing looks at new ways of doing things. Without digressing too much, I'm going to share one suggestion—I believe it was in York region. We had a very excellent presentation from York University on the York subway—the Spadina line—and all that, a lot of issues going on. York has an excellent transit system. Many of the regions are working on coordinating transit now—I'm sort of getting ahead of myself a little bit.

At that meeting one person, who I believe was a high school teacher, came unsolicited and made a presentation to the committee. These are just people wanting to bring up simple ideas that are cost-effective. I think her idea is worth listening to. She was so sincere and very well-spoken. She had given this a lot of thought. Frank Klees was with me. He is a former Minister of Transportation and very familiar with York region. He had not met her before, as far as I know.

She said that she likes to ride her bicycle to school, five or 10 blocks from where she lives. The reason is that she believes in health, wellness, health promotion and a healthy lifestyle—what Minister Watson is trying to promote. She said it's good for your health, it's good for the economy, it's good for the environment and it's inexpensive. She's trying to be a model for her students—that's what she said. I give her so much credit, because actions speak louder than words. We've said that. Her idea—are you listening?—is so unique.

Her suggestion was—and I throw this out for public consumption—that on, let's say, Pharmacy or Eglinton, one of the major streets heading north-south where it's almost too dangerous to ride your bicycle, one sidewalk

would be for cyclists and others and the other side would be for pedestrians. So where there are two sidewalks on those arterial streets, municipalities could designate one for cycling or non-motorized vehicles, and the one on the other side could be for walking. What a neat idea. We wouldn't have to have cycling lanes. We wouldn't have to have a whole bunch of congestion because of potential accidents and the risks to people riding bicycles. What a neat idea. Just think about it.

I put these things out because we're talking about a bill about the Highway Traffic Act and road safety. There's a free idea that came from—I could get the number for this young high school teacher who brought this idea up at one of our gridlock meetings.

We've had a number of very non-partisan comments with respect to the whole issue of gridlock. The preponderance of presenters were pro-transit. In fact, I've had input from the Canadian Urban Transit Association—Dr. Roschlau. I'm very respectful of the work done by Transport 2000. A lot of groups are working at trying to find solutions for transit. Why is it so important? It's important for our economy; it's important for our environment.

I think we often lose sight of these opportunities of putting on the record, since we are in public office, that we listen. The transit bill, Bill 137, came from one of my commuters on the GO train on the way to work one day, not from me. My job is to listen to things such as the idea of the young high school teacher on alternate lanes for use of bicycles and other innovative transportation modes—what was the name of that transportation thing that was at Toronto council?

Interjection: The Segway.

Mr. O'Toole: The Segway was a big issue at city council. I think to ban that is backward thinking. You've got to develop ways of modifying; otherwise, we're just going to build more roads, more cars and more congestion. The city of Toronto has no more room to build houses, let alone roads. So we have to think differently and listen to people who aren't engaged in this political process, because we're always wrong and you're always right, or the other way around. Some of these ideas—and Mr. Levac is a former teacher—come from some of the most unsuspected inputs. I just was so happy to hear the input, and I could go on.

One of the other issues that was raised in which they really respect the work done by the minister was—

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Pardon? Oh, yes. Young people in some of our schools and universities today are looking at issues that are far more innovative in connecting fixed transit, which technically is rail transit, with other modes of transit and interconnecting between those modes of transit. It's a big issue. How do you get people from GO trains at Union Station up to the airport or their final destination? I think some of the innovation of young people will solve these things. We think they're not solvable, but if we keep doing what we've always done,

we're going to get what we've always got. And what is that? Gridlock.

Another idea that came up in one of these presentations was that the 407 is built as a broader, high-volume transit route. That high-volume transit route should have a transit link on it. They're building it now. They could embed a super rail as part of the component of the 407 to bring them right straight to York University, almost, from the city of Kawartha Lakes, from Oshawa, from other parts of Ontario. In fact, they could bring people to other parts of the province as well. I just put to you that that's the way we need to think. That came up at one of our public sessions on gridlock as well.

I also want to thank Jim Wilson, who was the critic previous to me, for the work he's done on this file. He set up this template that I'm using, so I want to thank Jim for the work he's done to build a network of relationships. Of course, in opposition, we don't have any serious money—we do this basically on our own—to go out and network and listen to develop alternative policies so that we can become government in 2007. That's ultimately the goal, to get our feet back on the ground, to demonstrate to people in our policy documents that we do see a clear way for the future to bring accountability and responsibility. Our leader, John Tory, is encouraging us to do that and I'm just happy to be talking about it tonight under the freedom of speech allowed me under Bill 169.

One of the things that I have heard a lot of compliments about—and I want to put this on the record because each of us is looking forward to next week. It's the Remembrance Day constituency week, as we know; we're all wearing poppies, as we should. I've got to thank the Ministry of Transportation staff, because this idea of a veteran's licence plate is very, very well received and very well respected. The member from—Ernie Parsons, anyway, has Bill 5. He wants to name one of the highways down in his area for veterans. I'd be supporting those initiatives. Local members aren't trying to change the phenomenon of politics; they're just trying to make a statement out of respect for those individuals, like veterans, in our ridings. I certainly think that Bill 5, from the member for—it's Prince Edward-Hastings, I believe. All we're saying here is that we've tried to connect the dots. The Minister of Transportation is in an enviable position technically to do some of the things that we're hearing from the critic tonight.

The other thing that there is some question about is the MTO inspectors. There has been some media on this one; there has been a campaign. There are apparently 70 vacancies under the MTO inspectors. That kind of flies in the face of road safety issues, as I said before. I have an article here and I'm going to get it; I think it's in my notes. That issue was brought up, I believe, in the clippings today. Most of you have probably read it. It said that there isn't much confidence in the road safety issue, for a lot of different reasons. One of the issues that come up at these meetings was the number of these inspectors.

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I also want to mention one problem I'm having and that most members working for constituents are having. The one that I'm sure we all hear about is medical reinstatements. This is where someone, normally a doctor, would determine that a patient's licence should be removed. It could be a stroke; it could be high blood pressure; it could be some other more serious condition, I guess.

I have one that I'm dealing with right now, and I talked to the minister about it. Here's the point I made: It's a little bit complicated, but the idea is, getting your licence back is harder than getting it taken away. If it's determined that you're medically fit, you've got to wait for an appeal to get your licence back. It could be months. I think of constituents of mine in Port Perry or Caesarea as examples. There is no transit there. If you have a job that requires an automobile and you don't have wheels—and in many of our ridings you could be way out of town—you're not going to work. If you can't work, then your family suffers. In many cases in today's world—the economy—both people work. In that case, I would say that hopefully they—that whole idea of getting the licence back is an issue.

I've asked the minister to look at treating these areas that don't have public transit or any options other than driving their vehicle or getting someone to drive them—they should be expedited. In the case I'm dealing with, the doctor's report came back later, on a retest, indicating that he did not have this medical condition, but his licence had been removed. Now he had another medical document, but there was no expedited way of him getting that driver's licence back. That's his life and that's his family that are now in peril. I have some confidence that the minister did hear me on that issue in estimates.

I just want to put a few more things on the record that I think are worthy. As I said, Bill 5, by the member from Prince Edwards-Hastings, is something we could all work on. I think our leader John Tory is encouraging us to work together.

I just want to mention that a lot of questions on high-occupancy vehicle lanes, which are covered in Bill 169, were raised by Garfield Dunlop.

Driver's licence suspensions for medical reasons were mentioned by Gilles Bisson as well.

Northern airports were mentioned by Mr. Bisson, as well as highway construction. I have mentioned, as I said, the Lakeridge interchange and the Hancock Road interchange.

We've also put on notice for the minister—without sounding threatening here—that we do want to know, on behalf of the public, how much money they've spent or plan to spend to date on the 407 legal battle on that artificial promise they made back in the election. That is public money, and it's our duty to ask these difficult but necessary questions.

We've asked questions on some of the road maintenance. In fact, it came under the environmental commissioner's report on the very shoddy workmanship that was

done on a particular highway. Our Minister of Agriculture would know that, as the former Minister of the Environment. I'm certain that the two ministries involved will work to correct that to have clear goals and penalties.

There's also a great deal of work being done on northern highways, and that was announced a few months ago.

There are other questions that are outstanding, in the last two minutes I have here—the time has moved so quickly.

Mr. Tascona had a very good question. He's here tonight, and he could be in the chair shortly. He inquired of the minister, "Would the Minister of Transportation, for the maintenance of Highway 400 from Highway 9 to Highway 11, explain how maintenance contracts were awarded, provide the names of the maintenance contractors and describe the standards of maintenance?" This was dated November 1, so it's very current. There's an example from the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton. It is the duty of all of us to ask the difficult but necessary questions of the minister, as I would.

I could go on here, looking at Bill 169, a fairly broadly embraced and accepted bill that we together have worked on drafting. Certainly the Ministry of Transportation people themselves should be commended, because at the end of the day, let's be honest, let's deal with the truth here. I was privileged to meet Frank D'Onofrio, who is the acting deputy minister. Ernie Bartucci is the acting assistant deputy minister of the road user safety division. These people actually draft these bills and work with government on policy to direct priorities, whether it's the John Tory government—and hopefully it will be the John Tory government soon. But they are the people we work with, and they are the professionals in those areas.

I've taken as much time as—with unanimous consent, I could go on. Do I have unanimous consent?

The Acting Speaker: The member from Durham has inquired whether there is unanimous consent to allow him to continue beyond the normal 60-minute limit for his leadoff speech. Is there such consent in the House? I heard a no.

Mr. O'Toole: Could you name the person who said no, because they're really shutting down my voice on behalf of the constituents of the riding of Durham, and in the limited time I'm given here this late at night—

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: I do appreciate the time to address this, and I look forward to comments from members. With that, my comments on Bill 169 are as follows: Do not proclaim section 4; John Tory and the opposition will support the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I listen, as always, to the member from Durham. He talks about all of the issues contained in this bill, and you know, there are some really good things in this bill. I have to tell you, I am shocked at the things that make sense: high occupancy, northern airports, seat belts, buses, studded tires.

Then you go and ruin it all. Then you go and make a provision of the bill that makes many members from the Toronto area think that you don't know what you're doing. You talk about the whole issue around taxi cabs, you talk about the airport, you talk about scooping and you talk about the stuff of which you know nothing. You make a bill in which you have put this poison pill—I don't know, for us to vote against it or for you to say that you've done a good job for the constituents in Mississauga? Really, this bill is about so many things, but in the end what has happened is that you have supported one group of taxi drivers against another. I can't talk about this too often: It's one group of taxi drivers against another. You have picked the ones from Mississauga who are going to have the Liberal largesse. They are going to have all of this extra money. They are going to have anti-scooping provisions work for them. But the one—

Interjection: Where's the minister from?

Mr. Prue: The minister, who is from there—and if I get a chance to speak, I'm going to talk about the fundraiser, about the \$200,000, about the anti-scooping provisions that were promised. But the reality is that the Toronto cabbies are going to suffer because of your bill. The 2,500,000 people in Toronto, the mayor, the council and all the people who support them have been absolutely ignored. That's the problem I have. That's the problem I think the Conservatives have. It's the problem with your bill. Sever it, set it aside. Do the good things; don't do the bad things. Until you do that, we're voting no.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): Just a few comments I want to make. I've had a number of people come into my office regarding this bill. I think one of the reasons they come in and talk to me is because on city council I was chair of the city's parking and traffic committee. There were a number of things that they said to me that they're really pleased see, because these are the kinds of things that we kept pushing the government of the day to go ahead with.

What we asked for was the lowering of the speed limits and traffic calming, to give municipalities that authority to have speed humps in place. Only Toronto had that. That's in the bill, so that's great.

Crossing guards: I can't tell you how many times I've stood out in the street with our crossing guards, and it used to scare the heck out of me to see how people drove. We put into the bill the requirement that drivers remain stopped for school crossing guards until the children and crossing guards have left half of the roadway. That was something that was asked for by the crossing guards over and over in my community.

Cut down on illegal taxis. I've had the taxicab operators come into my office—5-0 Taxi, Niagara Falls Taxi—and they said, "Why doesn't the government put something in place to create offences when you have passengers being transported by illegal taxi drivers?" We have those in our community. They asked for this to be put in the bill. It has been, so I'm pleased to see that.

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There are a number of things that I could go on and on with, which were asked for by our community when I was on city council and now they're happening, they're in the bill. What they've said is: "It's a good bill. Keep going forward with it. No bill is perfect, but it's a great start. We're really pleased with it, and it's going in the right direction."

So I'm pleased to be able to comment on it. I'm commenting certainly as a member of the government, but more importantly, from the people in my community whom I represent and who are saying, "Go forward with this bill." So I'm pleased to have a few minutes to speak.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I'm pleased to take a couple of minutes to talk about this bill and congratulate the speaker on telling us about a lot of the good things that were in the bill, but there is this one stumbling block to do with the taxis.

One of the other things that's good in the bill—and I didn't hear the member mention it, but he may have—is about allowing our volunteer firefighters to go on roads when they become snow-blocked. Now they have a sign that goes up that says anybody who travels on that road—it's illegal, and this happens in rural Ontario a number of times.

I have to congratulate Jean-Marc Lalonde and Gilles Bisson, because I understand that they helped get this amendment for this bill. So I've got to congratulate the government on that one issue. I brought that up about a year ago, and hopefully it can be solved for this winter, because as I say, in Bruce and Grey, we have many snowstorms, and sometimes roads are closed and people can't go down, but we want our volunteer firemen to be able to do so, and they can't do that right now, before this bill is passed. When this bill is passed, they will be able to do that, and they won't be breaking the law. So we certainly needed that.

Unfortunately, just like many of the speakers have said, there are a lot of good things in this bill but then you throw in the taxi one and make a bit of a mess of it. As I say, I don't know why you would do that, why you wouldn't take that section and set it aside, because as you can see, there are a lot of people who think that more debate should be put into that part of it and looked at. Maybe they are paying you off. I notice some of them laughing about it. Maybe they are paying—I don't know. I wouldn't want to say that some people are paying you off to get this in, but it does look fishy when you've got so many other good things in the bill, things that were needed: more inspectors and seat belts and stuff like that that was needed.

I do commend you on helping out my volunteer firemen. I appreciate that, and we will go forward with the bill.

Mr. Tascona: I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate with respect to the comments made by the member from Durham. Certainly, this is a bill that has been debated at length. The weaknesses of the bill primarily focus around section 4 in terms of the cab driver issue that we

have pointed out in terms of it being set aside or not proclaimed until there's full consultation and, in fact, fairness with respect to that particular issue.

Transportation is an issue about which, quite frankly, I don't know what the Minister of Transportation is doing. I drove down from Barrie today, and I can tell you, it was bumper-to-bumper cars from about Highway 88, all the way down until the 401. I don't know what measures are being taken with respect to dealing with this gridlock, but certainly this minister really doesn't have any solutions. Bringing more safety to the road is something that we do need, but to deal with what we have out there is—day in and day out, you have heavy volume on the highways from the outlying areas coming into Toronto, and there are no solutions coming from this government.

One area that I've been pushing for—and the Minister of Transportation has responded—is with respect to GO Transit. That's something that we need desperately up in the city of Barrie. I could see that growing from the projected four trains a day, up to about 21 easily, because of the number of people who would like to be able to use GO Transit and be able to change their work patterns, be able to get to Toronto in an easier fashion and safer fashion. I'm very disappointed in terms of how the government is dealing with the gridlock out there and the heavy volume, because there doesn't seem to be a solution there.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. The member for Durham has two minutes to reply if he chooses to do so.

Mr. O'Toole: I just want to put on the record that during the hearings on Bill 169, I thought we were that close to an agreement. I'm going to quote from the Hansard of Wednesday, September 28, the standing committee of general government. The pages that I'm actually quoting from are G-1132-4.

Mr. Duguid was the critic or the parliamentary assistant at that time, and I'm quoting him directly. He said, in response on page G-1133:

"As we move forward with these reforms, certainly we will take that into consideration." He said, "It's important for us to know that in fact the opposition party, the Conservatives, are in favour of amending the Municipal Act" to amend the taxi driver issue.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford—I'm having trouble hearing; he keeps speaking.

On page 1134, Mr Duguid again: "I appreciate both opposition parties and critics being clear that they would support extending the provisions, whether it be under the Municipal Act or the City of Toronto Act, to Toronto or potentially other cities, to regulate licensing of taxicabs. It is helpful as we move forward in our reforms" of the act, and "I think they are in support of extending those provisions to municipalities. We're considering that now." I took that as an admission from Mr. Duguid that they were going to set that section apart. Now, I'm putting that on the record because we felt comfortable—my tone tonight is out of respect for the Minister of

Transportation. I'm asking him to do the right thing, to not proclaim that section. Give your word to Mr. Tory and you have the word of the Conservative opposition that we will be supporting Bill 169.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bisson: It's day two, and I have an hour. As the transportation critic for the New Democratic Party of Ontario, I want to raise a number of issues in regard to this bill, and some of them more related to practices within the Ministry of Transportation. I want to put on the record at the outset that there are a number of things in this bill that the New Democratic caucus supports. As transportation critic, there are a number of issues, such as the snow tires and others, that we're generally supportive of.

But we went to the government, and we said, "Listen, we're prepared to give you fast passage." We said, as the New Democratic whip—my caucus colleague, Mr. Peter Kormos, who's our House leader within the New Democratic Party, went to government and said, "Listen, we are going to give you fast passage on all sections of this bill at third reading in one second, provided you take the taxi part out of the bill." And the government came back and said, "No."

So I guess the government is doing a little bit of game-playing here. They want to try to score some political points in order to do whatever, and they're playing politics with the bill. I accept that. I understand the Liberals are very good at playing games. We saw today with the Gomery inquiry the kinds of games that this government likes to play—or Liberals like to play, I should say—when it comes to the largesse of the Liberal Party. This may not be so much largesse in this bill, but certainly it is largesse to certain people in the cab industry. So this may not Gomery in scope, but it certainly is the kind of largesse that this party has toward particular issues.

Now, in this bill, we are dealing with a provision that will basically give a great big gift to the limo drivers at the Toronto airport. I've got to say up front, I, like many other out-of-town members, fly into Toronto Pearson airport every week. I do Aerofleet and aerocab, or whatever they call them. I travel with those two on a very regular basis, and I have no particular argument with the drivers themselves. They're very professional people. They do a good job and get me safely from point A to point B. But I've got to say, as in the Gomery inquiry, we are finding that the Liberals in this particular case are giving a gift to their friends. You will know in the Gomery inquiry we found that the Liberals, when it came to certain ad executives and people who were friendly to the Liberal Party, had lots of money to dole out. They doled it out by the millions of dollars to the friends of the Liberal Party in the province of Quebec. I would argue that this is not just a Quebec phenomenon; it probably happens in many other places in the country. The difference is that they've not been caught so far.

2020

But in this particular case, the provincial Liberals are saying, "We want to be nice to the cab industry in the areas that are represented by certain Liberal members,

specifically the Minister of Transportation. So they went to the cab companies and said, "Come to our fundraiser and give lots of money to the Liberal Party, and we'll be good to you." Do you know what? Those limo drivers responded in spades. They came through big time. They came through with the cash. They walked up to the fundraiser and they gave the Liberal Party of Ontario, as I understand it, \$200,000. Can you get over that? What I've learned is that \$200,000 will buy you a bill in this House—

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay just crossed the line, and I would ask him to withdraw the statement he just made, which was unparliamentary.

Mr. Bisson: I withdraw, Speaker.

I will only say that what is clear is that there has been a certain largesse on the part of the Liberals when it comes to making sure that they're good to their friends. I think the sad part about this is that, at the end of the day, are cab drivers or limo drivers of any more worth, one than the other? I think it's rather sad.

We understand the issue for what it is. Listen, there is a legitimate issue in this bill that needs to be dealt with, and that is people, which the government side sees as scoopers, who basically operate cabs illegally without insurance, without licences from either the airport authority or the city of Toronto. I don't have a big argument with the government on that, because I agree that we should not be allowing people to go into the cab business who are not licensed and are not insured because, at the end of the day, that can and may lead to a very dangerous situation for the person who is picked up by somebody whom they have no idea is not insured. So I agree with the government.

But that's not all that we're dealing with in this section of the bill. What we're dealing with in this section of the bill is to say, "We are going to give to the limo drivers something that we're not going to give to the cab drivers of the city of Toronto, and we're going to do the same as it applies across the province," and I think that's rather unfortunate.

What is the government doing? Well, here's how it works. If you want to have a cab licence anywhere in the province, in a city or a town, you have to go to your municipality and buy a licence. In the city of Timmins, that licence is probably—I don't remember. I drove cab in 1970s, so I don't know what the numbers are, but it's probably 200, 300, 400 or 500 bucks in today's dollars. But if you're in a place like the city of Toronto, a licence, because they're limited, is quite expensive. What are they, Mike, a licence in the city of Toronto?

Mr. Prue: They're \$50,000 to \$80,000.

Mr. Bisson: Yes, it's \$50,000 to \$80,000 to get a licence. Once you buy that licence, you have the right to do business as a cab in city of Toronto. So I would argue that those people pay good money to have the right to drive their cabs, which are insured and licensed by the city, to transport people within the city of Toronto and

out of the city of Toronto to other locations that people may want to go to.

At the airport, we have a very different licensing regime. We have a licensing regime at the airport where basically the airport authority of the city of Toronto, as in other cities, says that if you want to come and pick up a fare here at the airport—

Mr. Prue: City of Mississauga.

Mr. Bisson: The city of Mississauga, exactly—you have an opportunity to buy a licence, for how much? About \$100,000 or \$200,000?

Mr. Prue: Only the companies own them; not the drivers.

Mr. Bisson: But per licence.

Mr. Prue: It's about the same.

Mr. Bisson: I've heard some people tell me over \$100,000, some of the people I've talked to who drive me on a weekly basis. So let's argue it's \$70,000 or \$80,000.

We understand the system. If you want to transport people out of the Toronto airport, you pay for a licence to—I guess it's the city of Mississauga—and you have the right to transport people out of the airport. If you want to do business in the city of Toronto, you pay for a licence from the city of Toronto and you have the right to transport people within the city of Toronto. But there's a real grave injustice, because what you have is, the people who work out at the airport have the ability to do business in the city of Toronto and don't have to pay for a licence. So they pick up fares that rightfully should be the fares of the cab drivers in the city of Toronto, and transport them back into the airport.

Mr. Lalonde: It's illegal.

Mr. Bisson: It's not illegal.

Mr. Prue: It's the same thing. That's what you're doing.

Mr. Bisson: Exactly. That's a very good point, Michael.

My point is that there's no reciprocal agreement. All I'm saying is, you could have taken one of two approaches. The approach I would prefer is that basically the business at the airport is the business for the limos and the business in the city of Toronto is for the cabbies in the city of Toronto. That would have been a fair arrangement, because they'd pay licences to both those areas to do business from those areas. But, instead, you've said, "We're going to tell the city of Toronto drivers that they can do business in the city of Toronto, but they're going to get charged if they go and pick up a fare at the Toronto airport," and vice versa. You're saying that a guy or woman who is operating a limo at the airport is not only going to be able to pick up a fare at the airport, but is going to be able to come into the city of Toronto, as now, and pick up a fare that rightfully should be a fare of those who drive the taxis in the city of Toronto.

So it seems to me this is not a balanced and fair approach to both parties. What you end up with is one that very, very heavily weighs in on the side of the limo

drivers. And I come back to my first point. Why is that? I believe, quite frankly, at the end of the day, it's because the government did a \$200,000 fundraiser with the limo drivers. The limo drivers came in numbers, they paid \$200,000 to the Liberal Party, and at the end of the day, they got themselves a bill. I think that's rather sad.

I don't disagree that a political party has the right to fundraise. That's not my argument. I think, God bless. If the Liberal Party is able to go out and fundraise in a way that's fair and that is not going to be seen as trying to buy favour and goes out and raises \$50,000, \$100,000, a half a million dollars, so be it. That's the system we live in, to be able to raise the dollars we need to run provincial and local campaigns. But in this particular case, it seems to me a little bit over the line, quite frankly. I think it's rather unfortunate.

The province of Ontario could have done what I think would have been fair and say the business in the city of Toronto belongs to the cab drivers of the city of Toronto and the business at the airport belongs to the limo drivers who work out of the airport in Toronto. That would have been a fair arrangement. Or the other position they could have taken, which is not opposite, but another way to do it, is that by buying your licence you are able to go to both areas. That's something I don't think the city of Mississauga would have ever supported when it came to the Toronto people coming in to pick up fares at that particular airport. So it's rather unfortunate.

I say to the government across the way, we, as New Democrats, were prepared to pass the entire legislation, save for the issue of the cab drivers, if at the end of the day they would have severed out all those other pieces of legislation. We would have passed the entire sections of the bill other than the cab and limo drivers section on a nod. Instead, this government chose to play a bit of politics, and I think that's rather sad.

So I want to say as a former cab driver—and I've been very upfront about this. I drove cab in the 1970s.

Mr. Craitor: Did you have a licence?

Mr. Bisson: Yes, I had a licence, and I drove cab in the 1970s. I was old enough then to do it, believe it or not. Could you not tell? Oil of Olay does amazing things for one.

Mr. Levac: Procter and Gamble.

Mr. Bisson: No, not Procter and Gamble; Oil of Olay. Is it Procter and Gamble that does it? Man, I can't believe that. I worked at Procter and Gamble.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: You too? Man, oh man, Dave. That's amazing.

So anyway, as I said earlier, this problem doesn't exist only in the city of Toronto. It exists in Ottawa, it exists in Sudbury, it exists in a number of municipalities across the province, and this legislation will impact on cab drivers and whoever has the contract at the airports in the cities and towns across Ontario, and I think that's rather sad. What we've got is legislation that is weighted on the side of those who do business at airports versus people

who do business within municipalities, and I think that's rather sad.

I also want to put on the record this whole issue of studded snow tires; as our friend the Minister of Northern Development and Mines calls them, Swedish studs. I don't know; I thought that was kind of an interesting comment. I'm all for Swedish studs. I think they're great. I just thought it was so funny when he said that in the Legislature. I just want to say that all of us understand that the technology of studded tires has changed from what it used to be years back. I remember when I was in high school in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were basically the old studded tires as we understood them, and they were quite damaging to the roads, and for that reason, the province of Ontario banned those tires on the roadways across Ontario. Now we have technology that basically, I would argue, probably can still do damage to some of our roads, but certainly not to the extent that we had before. In this bill, the government is trying to move forward on the tires provision.

2030

I just want to say that, as New Democrats, generally we're in support of that notion. But I want to raise a couple of issues. One is, if there is any damage done to the roadways in northern Ontario as a result of people using those tires, is the province prepared to compensate the municipalities for the maintenance of those roads or highways? That's the first question I would have. The second thing is, how are we going to deal with those people in southern Ontario who still get snow, ice and the bad conditions of winter? Why are we doing this strictly just as a northern Ontario issue? I have to believe it's for one of two reasons: (a) the government thinks it doesn't snow in southern Ontario—

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): They don't get a lot of ice in southern Ontario.

Mr. Bisson: —and they don't get a lot of ice in southern Ontario. I think that's not the case, because I've driven in southern Ontario, and I see that they don't have as much snow as we get back home but they certainly get ice. They get snow, they get sleet and slippery highway conditions. Certainly the government is not banning studded tires in southern Ontario because of weather conditions.

It is then (b), they think that maybe—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: No. I was going to say that the second issue is (b), maybe it's because they think that the roads in southern Ontario can't handle the studded tires. Which one is it? It's one or the other. Why would the government pass legislation that basically says that you can only use a studded tire in northern Ontario? When I drive my Ford F-150 from northern Ontario, should I put studded tires on my truck, I'm going to have to keep a pit crew in the back of the box, and when I get down to Parry Sound, take the tires off in order to be legal when I go into southern Ontario. My good friend Norm Miller, who resides right on that line, is going to have a business changing those tires as they come south.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: What's that, David?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): You just have to be a resident of the north.

Mr. Bisson: I'm just saying that it's interesting. My good friend the Minister of Natural Resources, although at times we find ourselves at the opposite side of issues—not often.

Mr. Miller: Just today, yesterday—

Mr. Bisson: Just today, yesterday and the day before, but not often. He said to me—and I was going to come to that—you have to be a resident of northern Ontario, and have your car registered as a resident of northern Ontario, in order to get permission to use studded tires. I understand what he's getting at, but my point is, why is it only for northern Ontario? I find it kind of odd, as a northerner, arguing this.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Snow-packed roads.

Mr. Bisson: That was going to be my next point. My next point was, is the government telegraphing us in northern Ontario that they're going to snow-pack the highways in order to cut back on winter road maintenance, so we're going to need studded tires?

It's either (a) the government thinks it doesn't snow and get icy in southern Ontario, (b) they think it's going to harm the highways in southern Ontario, or (c) they're going to cut winter road maintenance in northern Ontario in order that we'll need to buy studded tires. I just say to the government across the way that (a), (b) or (c) is a weird choice. Philosophically, I don't have a problem with the tire issue, but I'm just saying that the way that you've done this is kind of interesting, strictly for northern Ontario. It's kind of strange, and I think you could probably have done a bit better communication on it.

The other provision in this bill is one that I wholeheartedly support—I'm not going to get up and jump and say that I'm going to hug the government, as I've heard some opposition members say on certain issues—this whole issue of being able to help firefighters.

My good friend Norm Miller is going to take exception to this. The Conservatives, in the previous government, passed what they called the Safe Streets Act. Was that the one—

Mr. Levac: The squeegee kids.

Mr. Bisson: The squeegee kids act; that's right.

Mr. Miller: It was before my time, Gilles.

Mr. Bisson: It was before Norm Miller's time. He's a much more progressive Conservative than others, I must say.

Anyway, they had this bill that they passed in this Legislature and they said, "We've got to do something to get all these squeegee kids off the roads of the city of Toronto and other places. We're going to basically outlaw squeegee kids from being able to offer their services to the motoring public to clean their windshields." I thought at the time, "Here's entrepreneurship at its pure essence." Here are these poor little entrepreneurs trying to make a

living for themselves, these young people who are unemployed and down on their luck, who want to go out and become entrepreneurs, and the Conservative government of the day is saying, "You can't be an entrepreneur. We don't want you washing that windshield. Don't go out and get yourself your own money by working for yourself. We would rather you go to welfare or something." I thought, "Boy, what a weird thing for Conservatives to be doing." But they passed this legislation that basically said, "No more squeegee kids in the province of Ontario; zero; no more can they exist."

Well, the downside of that was it really affected some other people, because our good friends the firefighters—you know, my friends in the Legislature, Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats—especially the volunteer and the full-time guys, go out and fundraise for all kinds of great works in our communities. Firefighters are some of the—I wouldn't say the biggest volunteers in our community, but certainly they're there, and we see them. They would have this thing called the boot—what is it? The boot patrol?

Mr. Levac: The boot toll.

Mr. Bisson: Right, that's what they call it. They would go out and basically stand at the entrance of a community somewhere or on the road at a busy intersection and hold out a fire boot in order to collect cash for the charity of their choice. Harris said, "You can't do that, you firefighters. You're squeegee kids." I remember thinking, "What a silly thing for them to do." Why are we stopping this? Never mind our little entrepreneurs who are trying to wash somebody's windshield and are being told they're being put out of business by the entrepreneur party, which was killing the entrepreneurs at the most basic level, but then we went after the firefighters. They said, "You shall not have the boot toll. You cannot stand there as firefighters, hold out the boot and say, 'Drop your change. We need it for a charity in your community.'" I thought, coming from Mike Harris—he's the one who went out and cut out all the social programs that support our communities, and he's saying those people who are fundraising to replace the services that were cut by the Tories are being put out of business. I said, "What stupidity."

Mr. Levac: They lost \$500,000.

Mr. Bisson: It was \$500,000, my good friend Dave Levac says from across the way. I don't doubt it. I know in our community in Timmins, in Iroquois Falls, in Kapuskasing, Hearst and other places, that boot patrol raised dollars for those local communities.

Again, I say to the government, I support that part of bill that gives firefighters the right to go back and set up the boot toll. I would give you passage—bam—like that. All you've got to do is sever out the taxi portion.

I like firefighters. I like the boot toll. I like the idea of studded snow tires. I even like Rick Bartolucci with Swedish studs, but you've got to take out the taxis—you really do—because the taxi thing is a bit of a bitter pill, and we as New Democrats are saying, "Listen, we need to make sure that we have a law that treats limo drivers

and cab drivers equally when it comes to the issue of scooping.” If you have a law that says limo drivers can scoop but cab drivers can’t, you’re legalizing scooping. That’s basically what you’re doing with this bill, and we’re saying to the members across the way, “Help out the cab drivers. Help out the limo drivers. Put in place a law that is equal for both.”

Another part of this bill that I thought was an interesting one was the whole issue that we dealt with in regard to giving firefighters the ability to access a road when there is an emergency. As we know, at times you’ll have weather conditions or whatever it might be and the highway is closed for an accident, and you have a volunteer firefighter or a full-time firefighter who is off duty and all of a sudden—especially in small-town Ontario, where volunteers are normally the first response at an accident. You’re giving them the ability to go on a closed road.

This is the situation we’ve got: Imagine you live in small-town Ontario somewhere, northern, southern, southwestern, eastern, wherever it might be, and there is the volunteer firefighter out there who is basically driving, listening to his or her scanner and all of a sudden you hear, “Attention all units: Emergency on whatever highway. Come give us a hand.” If they got on that highway and the highway was closed, they wouldn’t have access, because the highway was closed, and as a civilian, off duty, they didn’t have the opportunity to access the highway to get to the emergency.

The government, I give them credit on this one, are saying that’s wrong. Listen, I’ve been a critic of this government. My good friend David Ramsay would know that, from time to time, I oppose things that even he does; but on this one I support him, my good friend David Ramsay from the riding just south of me.

I think it’s important—especially David knows, in communities in his riding volunteer firefighters are the first-tier response. In Kapuskasing, in Hearst, in Opasatika, all kinds of communities across northern Ontario—Moosonee—the first response at an accident is often a volunteer firefighter. We need to make sure that the volunteer firefighters have access to the closed road and are not prevented from accessing the accident to be able to provide tertiary care and be the first response at an accident. The government is saying, “We need to change that in order to make sure that those firefighters have access.” I say to the government, we support you. Uncle. “Mon oncle,” as we say in French. “Mon oncle; c’est correct. We give it to you.”

2040

But I say to you, my friends in the Liberal Party, Monsieur Levac, the whip, and others, Mr. Ramsay, my good friend from Timiskaming—he waves back. I just thought, David, I’ve got to make you feel welcome some times.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: It was hard to take; right, David?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: It is.

Mr. Bisson: I know. I can’t get over it either. I’m going to go out and burn this Hansard after.

It is a funny place we work in, though. I have to say, to digress a second, that all of us here in this House feel very passionately about issues. It doesn’t matter if you’re a New Democrat or a Liberal or a Conservative; we feel strongly about what we feel strongly about. At times we oppose each other and we go to war over a particular issue, but what’s really nice at the end of the day is that we still respect each other, because we all understand we have a role to play. I say to my good friend David Ramsay, I think he understands that probably more than most, because he’s been on both sides of the House and has been in a couple of parties to boot. That’s a little dig, but I thought I’d have some fun.

I will just say on accessing the highway, I think it makes sense to give those volunteer firefighters the ability to access that closed road so they can get to the accident, they can provide the first response and hopefully save a life.

I was in Hearst on Friday. Jeez, I was so many places last week, I don’t know where the heck I was, but I know that on Friday I was in Hearst. I met with the paramedics from the town of Hearst and the town of Kapuskasing.

One of the things we also heard when we were on committee on a bill that the Conservatives put forward—I forget which one it was—was that the key to being able to save a life is how quickly you can access the person who is in distress. If you have a person who is in an accident, having a heart attack, whatever it might be, the quicker you get to them, the larger the ability there is to make a difference in saving that person’s life and giving them a better quality of life after the trauma.

This particular bill, if it does anything to give volunteer firefighters a quicker response time to get to the accident and provide first response to an accident, I think that would be a good thing. I say to the government, again, it’s a part of the bill that we support. We, as New Democrats, would have no problem trying to support it.

My good friend Andrea Horwath is coming in. Oh, you’re such a good person, Andrea. I’ve got to say, as a whip, I am blessed to have good colleagues like this, like Andrea Horwath, who ran all the way probably from her apartment to bring me a letter I lent her last week when she gave her speech on this. I needed a copy from her, and she came all the way back to make sure that I have it. Isn’t that teamwork? Isn’t that great? Andrea, thank you.

So I say to the government, there are parts of this bill that we can support, we are OK with, we will give you quick passage of. We have said to Dave Levac, the whip, and to Jim Bradley, the government House leader, “Separate the bill. Sever the portions on the cab drivers. We, as New Democrats, will give you this bill on a nod.” That’s all you have to do. But instead, we’re here. It’s like 9:45 on Tuesday night. We’re using up House time. We’re—8:45; excuse me. I’m still on last week’s time. I haven’t quite made the switch yet. It certainly feels like 9:45, though, doesn’t it?

Mr. Levac: Stop talking.

Mr. Bisson: What’s that? Stop what?

Mr. Levac: Stop talking.

Mr. Bisson: Stop talking. I normally would be sleeping by this time, and I hope I'm not putting you to sleep, Dave. I don't think so. I think you and I are good enough friends.

Mr. Levac: I'm listening.

Mr. Bisson: I know, I know. David Levac and I go back a long way. I just say to my friends across the way, we could pass it.

I want to go back to the taxi bill, because I want to say that it's not just New Democrats who oppose this bill, Speaker. I know you will be surprised. Originally, Tories supported this bill, and I hope they will in the end—in regard to the taxi provisions in this bill, I think they're still onside with us New Democrats in trying to support the cab drivers in the city of Toronto.

But there is another person and a group of people who oppose this bill, and that's the municipality of the city of Toronto, David Miller. You know him, the mayor of Toronto?

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): Who?

Mr. Bisson: They say, "Who?" My, my, my, how sad they are that this guy is a New Democrat. Imagine that: The largest city in Canada and the Liberals are wondering who David Miller is. My, my, my.

Anyway, I want to make sure that I've got the right letter before I read it, right? I want to read a letter on the record, dated September 29, 2005, from one Mayor David Miller, city of Toronto, cc'd to Howard Moscoe. You don't want Howard Moscoe coming against you, my friend Dave; he's a pretty tough hombre. Anyway, I want to read what he says:

"I am writing to express city council's position on Bill 169 with respect to 'scooping' taxi fares. At its meeting on May 17-19, 2005, council adopted Planning and Transportation Report 4, clause 3, which included the following motion by Councillor Moscoe:

"...the city indicate its opposition to Bill 169 as it pertains to "scooping" fares at the airport, unless it is amended to remove the exemption that permits airport licensed vehicles from "scooping" fares within the city of Toronto, and the Minister of Transportation and opposition critics be so advised...."

"I support council's position on this matter."

Signed, "Yours truly, David Miller," mayor of Toronto.

I say to the government, you're the guys who ran in the last election and said, "We believe in cities. We believe in towns. We want to be partners. We want to work with cities. We want to do what they need in order to operate and we want to respect them." Aren't these the guys who said that? And here we've got the mayor of the city of Toronto, along with council, who says, "Don't pass the scooping provisions on Bill 169." Then the government says, "Oh, I don't know. We don't need to take that into account," and they go ahead and do what they've got to do. I just say it's kind of a sad thing. It would seem to me that if the city of Toronto, who are the ones who license cabbies in the city of Toronto, don't want this particular bill passed, then I would argue, don't

pass the scooping provisions of this bill. Do what New Democrats are asking you to do, which is to sever all those sections of the bill that deal with anything but scooping. We as New Democrats, along with David Miller and others, would say, "We'll give you quick passage," and at the end of the day you get all the other good parts of this bill. You leave the scooping portion out and you basically send that back to committee to be dealt with.

What the city of Toronto is saying is what we as New Democrats are saying, which is that you currently have sections basically within the City of Toronto Act and also within the Ontario Municipal Act that gave exemption—is it both or just one? Is it the City of Toronto Act or is it the Ontario Municipal Act that exempted the cabbies from the scooping? It's one of the two. I'd have to go back and look at my notes; it might be both. But one of the two basically exempted the ability of the city of Toronto to charge limos who scoop in the city of Toronto. So what the city of Toronto said—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Hang on a second. Until such time as you review and introduce new legislation on the City of Toronto Act or the Ontario Municipal Act, you should do nothing until we go to one of those acts, and when we do that act, we can revisit those sections of the other acts that give limo drivers the right to scoop in the city of Toronto. That's what we've got now: We currently have a regime in Ontario that says, at the end of the day, that we have an unfair playing field, and the government is entrenching that in this legislation. We say that's wrong.

I say to the government, you don't have to listen to Gilles Bisson, the NDP critic for transportation. You don't have to listen to Michael Prue—

Mr. Prue: But they should.

Mr. Bisson: They should, but you don't have to listen to Michael Prue or Peter Kormos or Andrea Horwath or Howard Hampton. Why not try the city of Toronto, the people who going to be affected by this? Mayor Miller says he doesn't want this bill. What are we doing passing it? I've got to shake my head in disbelief that you're actually going there. So I say to the government across the way—

Interjection: People are going to hate you.

Mr. Bisson: Yes, there are going to be a lot of people in the city of Toronto who are not going to like the government over this. I would imagine there are certain people in Mississauga and other parts who are limo drivers who paid \$200,000 worth of fundraisers to the Liberal Party—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Well, you know, I listen to my good friend Jean-Marc Lalonde, with whom I go back a long way. He is a good friend of mine. He and I are colleagues in arms on a whole bunch of issues and the francophone issues, but on this one I disagree. I just think it's rather unfortunate. So I say to my friends across the way, you should reconsider.

2050

Now I want to raise another issue, something totally different. This is something that I'm sure a number of members have seen come across their desks or gotten by way of a phone call. How many MPPs have gotten a phone call from somebody who's had their driver's licence revoked as a result of a medical review? Oh, wow. All of us, right? What an irritating situation we're in.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Red tape personified.

Mr. Bisson: Red tape personified. I've got to agree with you. This is a Liberal telling me this, and I agree with him. What riding are you from?

Mr. Leal: Peterborough.

Mr. Bisson: The member from Peterborough and I agree, and I see other members are now saying the same.

I'm going to tell you a couple of stories about how stupid this is, all right?

I've got a Mr. Gemme, and I've got permission to use his name in the Legislature. About a year ago this time, poor Mr. Gemme got dizzy. He was not feeling well, and he said, "I'm going to go get checked. I'm not sure what it is, so I'm going to go to the hospital." He goes to the hospital, and he happens to go to the Timmins and District Hospital on the same date a neurologist happens to be there, a Dr. Meloff, who I know quite well. He goes to the attending physician in the hospital and the attending physician checks him. They do the blood work, they check the heart, they do all those things, and they say, "We can't find anything wrong with you, so maybe we will get you to see the attending neurologist who is here today."

The attending neurologist looks at him and says, "There's nothing wrong with you, but I've got to send a report to the drivers' examiner. I've got to send a letter to the Ministry of Transportation saying that I've seen you," because there is a regulation in Ontario that says that if a physician sees a patient for some kind of seizure, they've got to report it to the Ministry of Transportation. The minute that they write "seizure" on the paperwork, what happens? The driver's licence is gone, boom, finito. You no longer have a driver's licence. So poor Mr. Gemme a little bit more than a year ago got his licence revoked.

It happened to you, Jean-Marc? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Lalonde: No.

Mr. Bisson: I thought you were saying it happened to you. He had his licence revoked as a result of walking into emergency because he was feeling dizzy. Now, as it turns out, it had nothing to do with a seizure. This is the part that was so frustrating.

Mr. Leal: What did he have?

Mr. Bisson: I don't know what he had, but it wasn't a seizure, and I don't want to get into his medical records because, as you know, you're not allowed to do that here. I just want to say that it wasn't a seizure. It could have been the flu, it could have been what he ate, it could have been anything, but I'm not going to get into that, it wouldn't be fair.

The point is that Dr. Meloff had no choice but to send the report to the Ministry of Transportation, and had to say on the report, "Saw this gentlemen. Was referred to me because of a suspected seizure. Checked him out. Don't see anything wrong with him. Have referred him back to his family physician." As a result of that, the Ministry of Transportation took his licence and said, "You don't have one any more."

Now, try to get it back. Here's the problem we have as MPPs: Mr. Gemme comes to see us and says, "They took my driver's licence away." We said, "Let's check it out." I talked to Dr. Meloff. Dr. Meloff said, "There's nothing wrong with the guy. His driver's licence should be reinstated. It never should have been taken in the first place. He has no medical condition that should cause him to lose his driver's licence."

I thought that if I got a letter from the specialist we should be all right. The attending neurologist wrote a letter—I think it was about October of last year—to us that we gave to the Ministry of Transportation to say, "This guy's got no problem. Give him his licence back."

Well, God, we wait for them to take a look at the letter. That's the first problem. It probably sits there for the better part of a couple of months before the medical review specialist at the Ministry of Transportation looks at it. They look at it and say, "Seizure. OK, we confirm." The licence is still gone. I then get on the phone and say, "Come on, give this guy a break. The neurologist is saying there's nothing wrong with him." They say, "We need more medical evidence." So I call the family doctor who happens to be my family doctor, Steve Cohen. We had a bit of a chat. Nothing's wrong with him. Now we send letters back to the Ministry of Transportation from the doctors saying, "There's nothing wrong with this guy. Give him back his driver's licence."

We just got his driver's licence back about three weeks ago. It took over a year to get this man back his licence.

I'm saying, listen, as an MPP, I accept that if you've got somebody who is a danger to the public because they may have a seizure or a condition that prevents them from driving safely, we need some kind of restriction or to take away his licence. But when you've got the attending physician, the family doctor and the neurologist all saying the same thing, that there's nothing wrong with the guy, what are we doing taking away his licence for a year? He can't work. You can't get to work if you happen to need a driver's licence for your job. It takes away your mobility. Imagine living in rural Ontario, my good friend Jean-Marc Lalonde, imagine in Prescott, Russell, in Embrun or one of your small communities, or mine in Opasatika or Fauquier? If you lose your driver's licence, man, that's a pretty tough situation. You can't go shopping to get your food, you can't go to the liquor control board to get your bottle of wine on the weekend—that would be a disaster for me—you can't do anything, so you have to rely on your wife. What do you do if your wife doesn't drive? In my case, my wife doesn't drive—never did drive. So what do you do?

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: No, my wife doesn't drive. So what do you do? You're really in a tough spot. We got his licence back. I'm going to come to the end of all this.

I've got another case. I'm just going to call him Willie. Actually, this is an interesting story. There is a coffee club, as I call them. They're good friends of mine who are of a different political persuasion. They happen to be a little bit right of me.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: What's that? Right, the coffee club. I think most of them are Conservatives in this particular coffee club. But I like to drop in and talk to these guys when I get a chance, in the morning. They give me some good ideas every now and then and I set them straight about politics and how they should see things, but that's a whole other story. Actually, there are a couple of Liberals at that table, too. Anyway, my point is, I go there and we kibitz and they tease me all the time and call me their socialist friend and, you know, everybody should have a friend who is a socialist and keep them far away. We have these kinds of conversations. It's quite fun.

Anyway, I go there one morning and this one guy, Albert, says to me, "My brother lost his driver's licence and he's distraught." Here's the story. The guy was a bus driver. As a bus driver he had an accident, working on his bus or working at home—I'm not sure what happened, but he lost the vision in one eye. So he went to his employer and said, "Listen, I really don't think I should be driving a bus. I just think it would be better if I was working in the garage, doing something other than driving a bus, because I've lost the vision in one eye." This was years ago. So the employer says, "Yes, not a problem. We'll accommodate you. We think that's a fair request. We'll give you another job within the transit, with no loss of income." So he does what he does within the garage of the transit and everything goes on fine.

So the guy works for years and when he's eight months from retirement—this is the silly part of it, right? One day the employer decides, "We think it's important that you get this particular classification of licence, because at times we may want you to drive the bus from point A to point B, so you have to have that licence." He says, "No, come on. I've got eight months to retirement. Why are you doing this to me? In eight months I'll be gone. I'm gone this spring. Why are you asking me to do this? Just let me work out my retirement and I'll be gone." "No, no," they said. "We want you to do this." So he has to go for the driver's test. He doesn't go for the driver's test; he goes for the application. He has to do the written. Guess what happened? The licence was gone. They withdrew his licence—his class G, not the bus driver's licence. They never got that. They took his class G licence away and said, "You can't have a driver's licence because of your condition."

How many people do we all know who drive with vision only in one eye? I'll bet we all know somebody. I know a number of them. I know a driving instructor who has one eye—probably the best driving instructor we

have in our area, quite frankly. That's not a reason why a person shouldn't be able to drive safely, right? But the Ministry of Transportation, I imagine because they've got some kind of regulation, says, "Well, we're going to withdraw this guy's licence." Here's the problem: The minute you have lost your licence, as my good friends Mr. Miller, Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Chambers, Mrs. Pupatello and Mr. Peterson know well, and especially my esteemed colleague Mr. Racco—Laurie will never forgive you, by the way, from the last election, but that's another story.

I would only say that at the end of the day, this poor gentleman lost his licence, which threw him into a whole bunch of stress. This guy is saying, "I'm almost at the end of my work career and I've lost my driver's licence, and now I can't drive myself to work." He lives outside the city of Timmins. He has to get into the community in order to get to work, and it has become a real problem. So here we are working at trying to get his driver's licence back.

Here's the kicker that I like. They said, "All right, Mr. Bisson, not a problem. Send him in to see a special medical examiner," of some type, to do some kind of a test on his vision, "and we'll give him back his class G." Guess where is the closest place to Timmins that he can go to get this test? Who here represents the city of London? I'm telling you, the closest place he can go to is London. I love London, England, and I love London, Ontario, but I don't believe, at the end of the day, somebody from Timmins should only have one option: to go to London to get a test to get his driver's licence back. We say to the Ministry of Transportation, surely to God you can figure out some way that this guy can get his class G licence back without having to go to London, Ontario. They said, "Oh, no, bureaucracy says, according to manual 5(3), regulation 53, buried somewhere in paragraph 300, printed probably in 1912, probably thought about in 1908"—just about the time they got the car out—"you've got to have this particular test to get your driver's licence back." So this poor guy has to make his way to London.

2100

I just want to point out, what do you do if your wife doesn't drive? How do you get to London? "Hi, friend, neighbour, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, can you drive me to London?" which happens to be about a 12-hour drive from Timmins if you drive the way I do; probably eight hours the way Mr. Ramal, my good friend from London, drives. Because I'm a law-abiding citizen, right? I never speed. All right, OPP friends who are watching, you know me. I'm a law-abiding citizen. Actually, I don't speed.

Mr. Leah: Not like Yakabuski.

Mr. Bisson: Yes, if it was Yakabuski, he'd do it in two hours.

Mr. Leah: He's a legend on Highway 28.

Mr. Bisson: The legend of Highway 28. I like that.

But I just say, what is wrong with a province that says that we have to get somebody to have a test in London when they live in Timmins? Imagine if this guy lived in

Red Lake or Kenora. They would say, "You've got to go all the way to London." Do you know how far that is by road? There's a time zone difference between Kenora and London. It's a two-day drive. And that's the closest place you can get a test. I say to the government across the way, I understand you didn't create this problem, but we've raised this issue at the estimates committee with your minister and he didn't quite get it, I thought. Anyway, that's a whole other issue. So we're basically making some recommendations to the minister to fix that, so people are not put in the position of having to go on a 10-hour drive to go to a medical appointment in order to get back a class G licence that they should never have lost.

Here's the kicker. He goes to the first appointment and they say, "You did really well, but we've got to see you again in about a month." So the guy has to go all the way back to Timmins, sit there on pins and needles and hope that he gets back to London in a month in order to redo the medical examination so he can possibly get his driver's licence back, hopefully some time before he retires. I say to the government across the way, I'm making a little bit of fun of this, but, man, this is serious stuff for people like Willie and Mr. Gemme and others we've represented.

I've got a guy in Kapuskasing. I remember this one—and I've got to be careful, because I didn't get permission to use his name, so I won't. But I'll tell you this story. The guy went into the emergency, you know, after having a couple, and the doctor decided that he had had a seizure. It wasn't even a seizure; the guy probably had a few too many. It took us eight months to get his driver's licence back. The guy didn't drive to the emergency ward, he took a cab. He didn't break any law. He just went there because he wasn't feeling good. But here this guy lost his licence and lost his job. This was the sad part, because the guy needed a driver's licence to do the work he was doing. So there are all kinds of examples about how people are really put in a very bad position as a result of some pretty stupid rules.

The other one I wanted to raise—I've got another constituent. I'm trying to remember his name, because I did have permission to raise this. I'm trying to remember offhand. Anyway, I'll tell you the story. This particular fellow lost his licence as a result of a health incident. The health incident did, quite frankly, justify him losing his licence in this case. The guy came into my office and said, "Gilles, I had an incident. I had a medical condition that basically caused me to lose my driver's licence, and I couldn't get my driver's licence back until such time that the doctor said I had a clean bill of health and was able to drive again. I don't argue that point. I don't like it, I don't like it that I got sick, I don't like it that I lost my driver's licence, but I understand why the government took my licence away."

In order to get his licence back—it was a year after he lost his licence. Two problems: First, they said, "You have to go for a specific driver's test," to get back the class of licence that he had—and I can't remember, but it was some kind of truck driver's licence—and there was

none in Timmins. The only place he was able to get the test was in Sudbury. So here's this guy who needs to get his driver's licence back in order to go back to gainful employment and the only place he could get the test was in Sudbury, as approved by the Ministry of Transportation. I just want to remind the Ministry of Transportation that there is life after Sudbury. You know, there's a whole new world north of Sudbury, there's a whole new world north of London, where you have northern Ontario and communities like Kapuskasing, Hearst, Timmins and Thunder Bay. You've got all kinds wonderful people living there who need services too. I say to the Ministry of Transportation, do you want to get out of your old regulations and try to figure out how you can provide services to the people in northern Ontario, so that they don't have to go out of the community to get a driver's test to get their licence back? That's problem number 1.

Problem number 2: They wouldn't give him back a full licence. Now, why is that? Do most people understand? Do you know what, Mrs. Jeffrey, member from Brampton Centre? I'm a big fan of yours. I've got to say that she's one of the best Chairs we've seen in committee in a long time. I want to say that in this House.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: I don't think she does, because I think that will probably—will that keep you in committee? If so, I take it back.

Mr. Prue: It's going to be in her next election brochure.

Mr. Bisson: That's OK. I like her as Chair. I digress, but there are not a lot of members who come to this place who right off the get-go understand what their job is as Chair. There are people in this Legislature who have been around a long time who don't do very well as Chairs. I've got to give you some credit: I sat on a couple of committees with you and found you to be quite effective. Take that out of your campaign literature, why don't you?

I just say to my good friend, the member from—

Mr. Leal: Another endorsement.

Mr. Bisson: I don't endorse Liberals, because I think that Liberals run like New Democrats and govern like Tories. I always argue that. Listen, do you remember the hydro, last election? This was the Liberals: "Vote for us. We're opposed to the privatization of hydro. We think that Ernie Eves and Mike Harris got it wrong." Then they got elected, and said, "We like privatized hydro. We want to keep on doing what Ernie Eves and Harris did." Do you remember the P3s? "We're opposed to public-private sector partnerships. We're opposed to P3s." They got elected and said, "Well, they're really not P3s but they are P3s, and we're going to keep on doing them too." They run like New Democrats but they govern like Tories. I've always said that.

Mr. Miller: I wish they did.

Mr. Bisson: We tell you that they are. Norm said, "I wish they did." I'm just saying they do. Look at the hydro policy; look at the P3 policy; look at most of what

these guys are doing. Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dumber, that's what we've got, basically.

Mr. Leah: I remember the campaign in 1990: Bob Rae and government-run auto insurance. You were going to save 50%.

Mr. Bisson: Yes. We should have done it; I agree with you. We should have done public auto. I have no argument with you; I lost that argument. Public auto should have been done. I admit it. Bob Rae was wrong not to do it. I say it. He should have done public auto. Some of us fought for it.

Interjections.

Mr. Bisson: You make me digress. Stop that.

Some of you on the other side were New Democrats, but that's a whole other story.

I just say to the members across the way, now that I've got your attention, why is it that people lose their driver's licences because of the stupid rules we have about how we apply people losing their licence for medical conditions?

Here is what the doctors tell me: "We don't disagree: If there is somebody who we think should be restricted or should lose their licence because of a medical condition, we should have the ability to report that so that the highways are safe." What the doctors and specialists oppose is that they've got to report everything: lots of people with red tape, all kinds of it, and as a result all kinds of people lose licences, and once they lose licences they can't get them back.

If you lose your licence for more than a year, you end up having to go back through the graduated driver's licence system. We all agree that the graduated licence system is a good system; no argument. But somebody who has already got their licence and loses it because of a medical condition shouldn't have to go back through the graduated driver's licence system to get a full licence.

Here's the scenario: Mr. or M^{me} Smith lose their licence at age 55 because they've had a stroke, or whatever condition it might be, some kind of seizure. They recover after a year of having lost their licence and have to go back to get a driver's licence as if they were 16. We don't count the driving experience they had from 16 to 55; we say, "You're a brand new driver." I say to the government, in this bill we could have amended that. I suggested that at the committee level. We should have amended the legislation to say that anybody who loses their license for a year as a result of having to report a medical condition should get their regular licence back. I say to my good friends across the way that that's something we could have done in this bill that would have been quite helpful.

2110

I say to my good friends across the way, here is an opportunity you had, I believe, and my good friend Michael Prue understands as well, where we could have passed this legislation on a nod. New Democrats told you, "We will pass all parts of this legislation on a nod—we will vote in the affirmative; we will say yes to this legislation—if you withdraw the section on cab drivers

and limos." This government, for whatever reason, said, "No. We want to play politics with this, therefore we're going to leave it in." I just think that's rather sad. The government had a chance to have a win here. It would have been an easy win. I think it would have been good for the people of Ontario. Instead, they pass a bitter pill through this debate and through this legislation.

Mr. O'Toole: It's a lot like Bill 183, really.

Mr. Bisson: It's a lot like Bill 183. You're quite right on that.

I'd just say to the government that we need to have a new way of doing things in this Legislature. That's the point I want to wrap up on in the last six minutes that I've got. The people in Ontario want to see their Parliaments function, and by and large our Parliament does function. They want to see every now and then that opposition and governing parties basically work together to do what is best for the people we represent. I think this is a shining opportunity where we could have done what's right for cab drivers, firefighters, driving schools and all kinds of other people in this province. We could have passed it on a nod, and at the end of the day the government would have gotten credit for having done what's right, the opposition parties would have been acknowledged for supporting a government bill and doing what's right, and we could have referred off to committee the parts that we didn't agree with. Instead, the government says, "We got a majority. We'll do what we want." I think that's rather sad.

That brings me to my point. I've always believed, Speaker, and I've raised this in the House a number of times, in the system of proportional representation. I think this is an example of how proportional representation can work for people. Why should a government that doesn't have a clear majority in an election, 50%-plus of the vote, have more than 50% of the seats? Our system is an adversarial one. A government gets elected with less than 50% of the vote, as all governments have except for a few in the last 100 years. They get 50%-plus of the seats and they can do what they want.

Here's what happens. The Premier's office—you remember that: Mr. Harris, Mr. Eves, Mr. Rae, Mr. Peterson, Mr. Dalton McGuinty—same thing. Change the players, same old story. Those guys have their office, they have their unelected staff around them, and they say, "You backbenchers will do what we tell you to do or else you may never get into cabinet; you may never get the appointment to a committee; you may never get whatever." The poor old member who has been elected for the first time says, "Oh, Mr. Premier, I want to be in your good books, so I will vote for legislation that I don't like, because I have to be good to my party. But more importantly, I've got to be good to my Premier, because one day the Premier will look at me and say something nice, like, 'Mr. or Mrs. MPP, you're a parliamentary assistant,' or 'You're in cabinet.'" How does that serve the constituents we represent?

I would say that there are other systems. Under proportional representation, the idea is that those elections

would say that if a government only got 48% of the vote, they would have 48% of the seats, shy 2% of a majority. That would mean that the combined opposition would have 52%, as the people decided in the election. Then the government would have to work with the opposition. In our Parliament today, that would mean that if the Liberal majority, which got under 50% in the last election, wanted to pass this bill, they would have had to go to the Conservatives or New Democrats or a combination thereof to pass this bill. I would argue—

Mr. Murdoch: They were going to change things.

Mr. Bisson: Oh, yes, they're the democratic reform party that did nothing. That's a whole other story.

On this particular bill, my good friend Mr. Murdoch, you know that the Conservatives wouldn't have sold out the taxi drivers, New Democrats wouldn't have sold out taxi drivers, and I would argue that some backbench Liberals wouldn't have sold out cab drivers under a proportional representation system, and, God forbid, the democratic will would have been done. What is it with democracy that you guys don't like? So I say to the government across the way, we've got your dog and pony show going on on democratic reform. You're going to have an opportunity—my good friend Mr. Prue is on that particular committee, along with some other members, trying to deal with this particular issue. I think we can get it right. What we should be recommending is not what British Columbia did. They had a complicated system, the Irish system, which was basically so complicated that even the political scientists couldn't understand it. And even the Irish don't like it; that's the really interesting part. My good friend Michael Prue told me after the meeting they had with the Irish delegation in Ireland, or wherever they went, that even they didn't like it. Was it Ireland that you went to?

Interjection: We went there.

Mr. Bisson: Yes, Belfast or wherever it was. I think it's a good thing; I think members should travel.

Mr. Prue: Dublin.

Mr. Bisson: Dublin. Members should travel to other countries in order to learn what's happening in other places. I've got no problem with that; I've traveled to Vietnam, central and west Africa and South America. I've got no argument with it. I've been to Europe a number of times on behalf of APF. I think that has built my ability as a member to do my job. I have no problem with that.

But my point is, the government has got something—

Mr. O'Toole: Kormos does.

Mr. Bisson: Well, Peter doesn't like to travel. He likes to drive but he doesn't like to fly, so that sort of limits where he can go. But that's another story.

I say to the government, you have a chance to do the right thing here on proportional representation and recommend to the voters, by way of a referendum, a system that would basically say that a governing party will only have a percentage of vote that they have in a general election and therefore, they can't just do what they want. The Premier's office doesn't have all the power. Imagine

that: Backbench Liberals having a bit of a say—whew, would that be fun—and opposition parties having a bit of a say.

I would argue that we wouldn't be having the problem we're having right now in northern Ontario with forestry. I know there are backbench Liberals who don't like it; I know even the Minister of Natural Resources doesn't like what's going on in northern Ontario. But how do you win your fight with the Premier's office and a cabinet that has its mind made up on a particular policy around hydro or whatever it might be?

Mr. Leal: Look what happened under Bob Rae: casino gambling.

Mr. Bisson: Listen, I argue that it happened under Bob Rae and I argue that it happened under Mike Harris and Mr. Eves. My argument is that you have to do the people's will in this Legislature, and I think the way you do that is to move to a system of proportional representation.

With that, I want to thank the members for the opportunity of having addressed this esteemed chamber for the last hour, and I would ask unanimous consent to give me another hour so I can continue.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay has sought unanimous consent of the House to continue for another hour. Is there such consent? I heard a no.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Sergio: Thank you, Mr. Chairman—or rather, Mr. Speaker. I guess the black robe just gave it away, even though you are always so impeccably dressed. My apologies.

Mr. Leal: It's the new tie.

Mr. Sergio: It must be the new tie, yes.

I don't have one hour to ramble, as did the member from Timmins-James Bay, but let me say this: It's a typical speech in the House when they say, "We are ready to support this bill, but...." It's like saying if my grandfather had wheels, he would have built a car. It's the same thing.

In this very short bill, I can count 32 improvements to the transportation system, but there is a little comma somewhere that maybe could have been in another place. They say, "Unless you eliminate this comma, we cannot support this bill." Well, my goodness. There are so many improvements—

Interjection.

Mr. Sergio: With all due respect to my colleague from Timmins-James Bay, you had an hour, and we listened to you.

The minister has spent a considerable amount of time addressing the needs—because this bill has already gone through public hearings, and we had clause-by-clause as well. If every bill had to be perfect, we wouldn't be sitting here at 9:30 on a Tuesday evening and we wouldn't have had public hearings; we would be going through them in one day—first, second and third readings—and there we go. There is always something that doesn't please someone.

Let me say that the improvements proposed in this bill, the safety measures that are being provided here for our people, go a long way toward making not only our highways and byways safer, but the way we drive as well and the way we deliver our goods. I think this bill deserves support, and I hope that in the end they will.

2120

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I want to point out that in this transportation bill, I see that it requires truck drivers, commercial drivers, to check for something like 70 itemized defects. This is up from 23. I sincerely hope that doesn't add to a plethora of additional rules and regulations and red tape. I suspect we'll be hearing from drivers about this. I would hope the government has consulted with the trucking industry on that one in particular.

I want to raise a question about the automatic road test that's now required for professional drivers once they turn age 65. I don't think anyone would argue against the fact that a driver, once they turn age 65, should have an annual medical, a written test to make sure they're up to speed on changes like we're seeing in this proposed legislation. If they fail the written test, obviously a road test would be in order. But I've had a number of meetings on this. I've had meetings with Kim Richardson. He's the president of KRTS truck training out of Caledonia, and he does raise this issue where if those commercial drivers, say a class AZ, have to perform a road test, they have to rent a tractor-trailer or get their company to provide one, to take a tractor-trailer out of commission, probably for a day, to permit this test. I've talked to a number of these senior drivers. They feel the actual road test, after in some cases millions of miles of driving, is unnecessary and ridiculous, and that's an amendment that I think might be in order for this particular bill.

Mr. Prue: I listened to my friend, as always, from Timmins–James Bay. He's erudite; he's passionate; he says it all.

The one point that I want to talk about again and again is the taxi drivers. The one thing I want to talk about to the Liberal members, especially the new Liberal members who were elected but two years ago and who think that this is a new bill—this is not a new bill. I challenge all of you to go back to the last Legislature and look to the private member's bill from the member who was then from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale. His name was Raminder Gill. He brought forward this self-same bill dealing with scooping at the airport. This Legislature, including Liberals who are now sitting all around me, who were there then, voted against it because it was a bad bill. And now you have seized upon this very same bill, with all of the same provisions, and you have adopted it as your own. I don't understand where you are coming from. I don't understand the old members sitting over there smiling at me who voted against Raminder Gill's bill, who are now standing up here thinking that it is the most wonderful thing because it is contained in your bill.

It is still flawed. It is still wrong. It is still bull-headed. It still pits the drivers from the airport versus the drivers from downtown Toronto. It is unfair. It is misguided. I don't know what else to tell you. For the newbies, go back and look and you will see that this isn't some new, brilliant scheme you have thought up; this is a stolen Conservative idea that failed. We are telling you—and we voted against it, as you did then, and we're still continuing to vote against it—you should have the good grace and the good sense to look at what went before you and realize it's even worse today than it was then.

Mr. Lalonde: There aren't too many people in this House watching this debate from the gallery, but let me tell you there are a lot of people sitting in front of their TV screens watching this debate. I want to make sure that the people are properly informed. When I say "properly informed," I don't like anybody being misled by a debate we have going in the House. When the member from Timmins–James Bay gets up and says that we intend to put in studded tires because we want to reduce maintenance on our highways in northern Ontario, it is completely false, because we have in place a contract at the present time that will expire either in 2010 or 2011.

The Acting Speaker: The member used the word "misled," which I believe is unparliamentary, and I would ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Lalonde: I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

To go a little further concerning drivers' licences being revoked, let me tell you, I go through this all the time. It's too bad to say it, but most of the time, when people come to my office and talk to me about having to wait for their driver's licence to be reinstated, first of all, I tell them, "Go back to your doctor or your neurologist and tell them to give you a copy of the report that was submitted." Did you know that seven to eight out of 10 times, the report is not sent to the medical review board within a couple of months? All you have to do is contact the medical review office and they will tell you immediately if the medical report or the neurologist's report has been sent in. Most of the time, it wasn't sent in.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Bisson: I'm hurt. My good, esteemed colleague, M. Lalonde, says I misled the House. I thought I was quite clear. The reason they lost their licence was because the report was sent in. It's not a question of the report never getting there. The report basically said there was nothing wrong with the guy. I can give you the documents if you want. I say to my good friend, my colleague from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell or wherever it is, that the basic problem was that the report was sent in. That's how they lost it.

I can't speak to all my friends who commented, I don't have enough time, but to Mr. Prue, what an interesting point he raises. I didn't raise it in debate. I remember Mr. Gill standing in this House on behalf of the Conservative Party saying he wanted the same bill. The Conservatives of the day voted for it, except for some of them like my good friend from Bruce–Grey, but

the Liberals voted with the New Democrats in opposition. They said, "We didn't want this bill going forward because we think it's a bad bill." Mr. Prue is right. Now they come back as cabinet ministers, and as backbenchers because they never made it to cabinet, and they basically say, "Oh, we want to do Raminder Gill's bill. We think it's a great thing." I say, you run like New Democrats and govern like Tories. That was my point. Members of the Liberal Party must finally stand up and be consistent in their position and say that they will do what they said they would do when they came to office, something they have not done.

Interesting point: My good friend Mr. Murdoch has seen fit to knock some sense into his Conservative caucus, because now they've jumped offside and they're with New Democrats saying that Mr. Gill's bill was bad and this bill is bad. I say to Mr. Murdoch, there's room in the New Democratic caucus for you. Come on over. Fly. Be free. Spread your wings. You'll have a great time.

The Acting Speaker: On that note, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2128.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 1 November 2005

THIRD READINGS

Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005,	
Bill 169, <i>Mr. Takhar</i>	
Mr. Kormos	619, 621
Mr. Berardinetti	620
Mr. Tascona	620, 630
Mr. Bisson	621, 631, 642
Mr. Lalonde	621, 642
Mr. O'Toole	621, 631
Mr. Prue	629, 642
Mr. Craitor	630
Mr. Murdoch	630
Mr. Sergio	641
Mr. Barrett	642
Debate deemed adjourned	643

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

TROISIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2005 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne le transport, projet de loi 169, <i>M. Takhar</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné	643



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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 2 November 2005

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 2 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

REPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONER

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I want to thank Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller for yesterday's annual report. Commissioner Miller addressed the major changes to Ontario's land use planning system, land use that spawns a myriad of environmental concerns related to sprawl, highway gridlock, aggregate extraction, water quality and natural heritage.

As Miller points out, "There is a fixed amount of land in Ontario, and each year there are more of us placing more demands on that land." Four million to six million more people are coming to Ontario, mainly to Toronto, over the next 20 years—more people, more cars, more garbage, more air pollution, and more demands for water, sewer and roads as our population skyrockets.

Last year I mentioned in this House that the United Nations Millennium Assessment had a stark warning about the alarming rate at which we are eating up our natural resources. The Environmental Commissioner raises the question: Why must population grow at this rate in parts of southern Ontario? He cites the examples of prosperous European economies that thrive without a burgeoning population base. Twenty years ago, Haldimand county in my riding had the same population it had 100 years ago.

I congratulate the commissioner for pointing out what we should already know, "that a planning regime based on the continuous expansion of population and the growth in consumption of resources ... is ultimately not sustainable."

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Suzanne Aucoin of St. Catharines, like so many others in Dalton McGuinty's Liberal Ontario, is being forced to finance her own cancer treatment. Suzanne Aucoin has colon cancer and the only drug that's effective at this point in her disease is Erbitux. Erbitux has to be financed out of pocket by Ms. Aucoin to the tune of \$100,000 over the course of the next six months, not because Health Canada

hasn't approved it—Health Canada indeed has approved it as an effective medication—but because the McGuinty government arbitrarily disallows intravenous medications from consideration for section 8 application so that it can be funded by Cancer Care Ontario.

That is cruel, it is unjust, it is unfair and it is a harsh attack on people in this province, good Ontarians, who deserve this province's support. Let me tell you what people like Ken and Margaret Cosgrove of Welland have to say: "Continuing to deny colon cancer patients access to Erbitux means that the Minister of Health is willing to let them suffer and ultimately die."

I say to this government that it's time for it to merely demonstrate the political will to end this incredible injustice to people suffering from cancer, to sign the necessary paper and ensure that immediately—not next month, certainly not next year, but immediately—persons with cancer like Suzanne Aucoin have this Health Canada-approved drug, Erbitux, and other intravenous medications approved under section 8.

COMMON GROUND CO-OPERATIVE

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I rise today to recognize a wonderful organization in Don Valley West called the Common Ground Co-operative. The co-operative is a non-profit organization that helps those with intellectual disabilities create employment opportunities for themselves.

The idea for the Common Ground co-op was formed in 1998 when Jim and Carolyn Lemon applied on behalf of their daughter Cathy for a grant from the provincial government. The grant allowed Cathy to start up a bakery and catering business called Lemon and Allspice Cookery.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): That's a good program.

Ms. Wynne: It's a good program. This grant, along with the generosity of Community Living Toronto, which provided Cathy free use of its kitchen, enabled the cookery to expand into a successful business.

As a result of this success, the cookery created the Common Ground co-op in 2000, which provides people with intellectual disabilities the support needed to create meaningful employment for themselves. Last year, Minister Pupatello and I visited the co-op and we can tell you it's really heartening to see people who might not otherwise have this chance actually have the opportunity to be contributing members of the workforce. It's been

such a successful model that they'd like to reach out to other communities around the province, and this is a model worth duplicating.

Congratulations to Jim, Carolyn and Cathy Lemon for their vision and for working with the community to create this program. I'm proud that government funding continues to support this wonderful initiative. This year, the Common Ground co-op is celebrating its fifth anniversary. I'd like to invite all members of the House to join me in commending the Lemon family for this initiative.

MINISTERS' EXPENSES

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): On this side of the House, we've watched the McGuinty Liberal government ministers thumb their noses at the Integrity Commissioner as they hid their expenses from him and partied across Europe on the taxpayers' tab.

Was Dwight Duncan's \$800 steak dinner reviewed by the Integrity Commissioner? No. Why? Because he billed it through an OPS staffer whose expenses aren't reviewable.

Did Joe Cordiano have his \$1,000 lunch in Milan or his \$1,000 dinner in Stuttgart reviewed? No. Why? Because he funded it through an OPS staffer.

What did Dalton McGuinty say about this flagrant breaking of the rules? He said, "Oops, you caught us. We'll start following the rules from now on. Trust me." How can we trust him? He botched the Sorbara affair, he botched the Takhar affair and now he's botched the \$50,000 Dwight Duncan European vacation affair.

Can we expect the Liberals to change and start to cooperate with the Integrity Commissioner? Well, let's look and see what their new candidate for the Scarborough-Rouge River by-election, Mr. Bas Balkissoon, has to say about Integrity Commissioners: "In the future, I will not participate with this Integrity Commissioner or any Integrity Commissioner process."

That is what Mr. Balkissoon said. He said it to the North York Mirror on July 27, 2005. He said he won't participate in any Integrity Commissioner process in the future. The McGuinty Liberals seem to have found the ideal candidate. They've found someone who's just like themselves.

1340

DETROIT-WINDSOR TUNNEL

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): Tomorrow will mark the 75th anniversary of the official opening of the Detroit-Windsor tunnel. It was 75 years ago that a new chapter in US-Canadian relations began when Canadian and American officials officially opened the mile-long Detroit-Windsor tunnel.

At the opening ceremony on November 3, 1930, the Honourable Thomas Gerow Murphy, Minister of the Interior and Canadian government representative, stated, "The opening of the Detroit-Windsor tunnel today is

another object lesson to other nations of the world on how international goodwill, such as that which exists between Canada and the United States, can be maintained and developed." The tunnel was also seen as a way to "enable each country to learn more about the other," and in that way, "further the spirit of international friendliness that now exists." The truth of these statements still resonates today, 75 years later.

As Canada's automotive industry heartland and a major economic hub for the province of Ontario, Ontario's and Windsor-Essex's economies are intricately linked with the international border crossing. The tunnel remains the only underwater international vehicular tunnel in the world and is a vital socio-economic link between the United States and Canada, playing a significant role in the economic health of Canada, the province of Ontario and Windsor-Essex, as it acts as a conduit for trade between the two nations.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate those who have made the tunnel a success over the past 75 years, and for the role that it has played in strengthening the friendship and the economies of both great nations. May its success continue for another 75 years and beyond.

CORMORANT POPULATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I rise today to ask the Minister of Natural Resources to take effective action against the invasion of cormorants in the Thousand Islands region into other inland waterways in this province. This is a significant concern. We've seen a devastating impact on sports fishery in the Thousand Islands area. The minister, when I asked him this question almost a year ago, talked about oiling eggs and said that he felt that would be effective.

There's a press release dated September this year from New York State Senator Jim Wright, which is indicating that we're having no impact on the cormorant population in the Thousand Islands region because of the lack of action of the Ontario government. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has been stymied by the lack of action on the Ontario and Canadian side of the border. Most of the nests of cormorants lie on the Canadian side. The Americans are trying to do something, but their impact is not really telling because of the lack of action of this minister and this Liberal government.

I encourage them to take action now, before it's too late. Save our fisheries.

ADVOCIS

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Today it's my pleasure, on behalf of all members, to welcome Advocis to Queen's Park.

Advocis is the largest voluntary professional membership association of financial advisers in Canada, with

5,500 members right here in Ontario. Its members are licensed to distribute life and health insurance, mutual funds and securities. For almost 100 years, Advocis members have provided financial advice to millions of Ontarians, delivering security and peace of mind.

As the first certified financial planner elected to the Legislature, I can share with my colleagues that I have been a proud member of Advocis for 20 years. Advocis members provide financial and product advice for Ontarians and Canadians across a variety of distinct areas, including comprehensive financial and retirement planning, finance and wealth management, estate and tax planning, and employee benefits planning. With members in every Ontario community, Advocis is uniquely placed to partner with all MPPs on all issues related to the financial services industry.

In the gallery today are several members of Advocis who have come to Queen's Park, and we welcome you. Tonight, Advocis is hosting a reception for all MPPs in the legislative dining room. On their behalf, I invite all members to attend and hear how Advocis can help their constituents and communities.

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I rise today to recognize delegates of the Ontario Principals' Council who join us today in the House and the Legislature.

As a principal on leave myself, it is always nice to see colleagues from my former life. Today was the council's Queen's Park Day, where they have met with more than 45 members of this House to discuss the issues that are affecting their members and, most importantly, kids.

The Ontario Principals' Council is a voluntary professional association that represents the interests of principals and vice-principals in Ontario's publicly funded school system. Currently, OPC represents 5,000 practising school leaders in the elementary and secondary panels, as well as 500 associate members from within the educational community. The OPC offers a wide range of services to its members in support of exemplary leadership in public education.

Our government is committed to excellence in public education. We understand that principals play an integral and pivotal role in their school communities. They are the hub of happy and safe school systems and they keep our kids safe and happy. The Ontario Principals' Council is an integral player in ensuring our principals receive support and representation. I know that our government will invite principals to the table to help shape the future of our publicly funded school system.

I salute the principals who have joined us here today and commend them for the work they do, both in our school communities and, more importantly, for our kids, and also as part of their own organization, the Ontario Principals' Council. I am proud to be among their colleagues and I invite us all to support our principals.

TAKE OUR KIDS TO WORK DAY

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I rise to acknowledge the nationwide program known as Take Our Kids to Work. Organized by the Learning Partnership, a not-for-profit organization of business people, educators and community leaders, more than 1.5 million young Canadians and tens of thousands of workplaces have benefited from this program over the last decade. This learning opportunity connects grade 9 students with the world of work and their own futures, providing a real-life experience in a work environment and the opportunity to experience different workplace roles and responsibilities.

Our government believes in alternative, outside-the-classroom programming designed to help students succeed. We won't give up on our youth and will work to challenge and engage young Ontarians by making school more responsive to their needs.

I want to acknowledge and welcome the many students in the gallery today and especially students from Parkdale Collegiate Institute and Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts who are job-shadowing with Minister Kennedy's office at the Ministry of Education. We hope they've all had an enjoyable day.

I have several friends who have brought their children to work today. I didn't have time to acknowledge them all, but I want to acknowledge Bernadette Curtis, who works in my office and who is here with her young son Sean. Welcome.

VISITORS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: On behalf of the Peel region members, I'd like to draw members' attention to the east members' gallery and introduce Kuldip Dheer, whom we know as Jake, who is our station manager at Rogers Cable 10 in Mississauga. Jake is an indefatigable volunteer whose efforts have touched just about every community group and charity in Mississauga. He's been a proud Mississauga resident for 25 years and he is Mississauga's Citizen of the Year.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That is not a point of order, but welcome.

I have the distinct pleasure today of introducing, in the Speaker's gallery, the Honourable Allan Lawrence, former member representing the riding of St. George in the 25th through 29th Parliaments. Help me to welcome Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Ian McFarlane, president of the Ontario Principals' Council, and Mr. Mike Benson, the executive director of the Ontario Principals' Council. They're here today, along with other members of the council, and I would ask members to welcome them to the Legislature.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to advise this chamber that

with us today doing his job-shadowing is grade 9 student and former page—year 2004—Daniel Walker.

1350

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: All right. It must be Wednesday. The member for Durham on a point of order.

Mr. O'Toole: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When you were introducing the Honourable Allan Lawrence, you forgot that he has with him his granddaughter, Emma Healey, who is a student at the University of Toronto Schools. Welcome, Emma.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's certainly my pleasure to introduce my job shadow today, Anya Scott. Anya, if you would please be recognized. She came from the most beautiful riding in Ontario: Huron-Bruce. Welcome, Anya.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated November 2, 2005, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (N° 2)

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 18, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2005 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say “aye.”

All opposed will say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

The minister may have a brief statement.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): This bill gives effect to a number of the outstanding measures that were contained in this government’s 2005 budget.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT), 2005

LOI DE 2005

MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (PARTICIPATION COMMUNAUTAIRE)

Mr. Fonseca moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to community involvement activity hours and board support / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation à l'égard des heures d'activité et de l'appui des conseils au titre de la participation communautaire.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): This bill has already received tremendous support from the mayor of Mississauga, from the school boards and from a number of seniors’ groups. The bill amends the Education Act by permitting the minister to require that students complete no fewer than 60 hours of community involvement activities before receiving their Ontario secondary school diploma.

The minister may also require that school boards establish and maintain policies and procedures to assist students in completing the required number of community involvement hours. Boards are given the concomitant power to establish and maintain such policies and procedures.

CITY OF HAMILTON ACT, 2005

Ms. Marsales moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr22, An Act respecting the City of Hamilton.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Under the standing orders, this is referred to the committee on regulations and private bills.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE REPORT

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated June 13, 2005, the select committee on electoral reform shall present its final report to the assembly no later than December 1, 2005.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I’m told you need to ask for consent.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Then I will seek unanimous consent to move that motion, Speaker.

The Speaker: Mr. Caplan has asked for unanimous consent to move the motion without notice. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Now I do move the motion that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated June 13, 2005, the select committee on electoral reform shall present its final report to the assembly no later than December 1, 2005.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 2, 2005, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1357 to 1402.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hoy, Pat	Peters, Steve
Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Phillips, Gerry
Barrett, Toby	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Klees, Frank	Qaadi, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Kular, Kuldeep	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Runciman, Robert W.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Cordiano, Joseph	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Sterling, Norman W.
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Fonseca, Peter	O'Toole, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 66; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm asking for unanimous consent that all three parties have up to five minutes to

speak on Women Abuse Prevention Month, which is the tradition in this place.

The Speaker: Ms. Churley has asked for unanimous consent.

Interjection: No; a statement.

The Speaker: Statements by the ministry.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

VIOLENCE FAITE AUX FEMMES

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I rise today to remind the members that since 1986, November has been recognized as Wife Assault Prevention Month in Ontario. With the support of many fine organizations across Ontario dedicated to stopping violence against women and supporting abused women, le mois de novembre sera désormais connu sous le nom de Mois de la prévention de la violence à l'égard des femmes. November will be now known as Women Abuse Prevention Month.

It is widely felt that this new designation more accurately represents the individuals affected and the work being done. The month itself continues as a clear reminder that violence against women remains shockingly pervasive in our society, and it raises awareness of the plight of women and children who are subject to abuse. It reminds us also of our collective responsibility to work on their behalf toward the prevention and elimination of violence.

The stats on this are chilling: 25% of Ontario women experience spousal abuse at least once in their lifetime, and only 27% of spousal assaults are reported to police. Thirty-seven per cent of those spousal abuses are witnessed by children. An average of 25 women per year are killed by their spouses right here in Ontario.

Domestic violence is a concern that goes far beyond partisan politics. I know we all agree on the need not only to address it as an issue, but to shine a harsh light on it so that all Ontarians can be mobilized in the effort to reduce it.

Domestic violence not only affects the safety and security of so many of our citizens, but also their sense of confidence and self-worth. Children who are subjected to abuse not only learn unhealthy attitudes about relationships, but can pass them on to future generations.

Il faut mieux soutenir les victimes. Il faut briser le cycle de la violence. Victims must be better supported. The cycle of violence must be broken.

It's been almost one year since we tabled a comprehensive, four-year, \$66-million domestic violence action plan. It's a long-term commitment, it's going to take time to do it right, but we are making steady progress. That

progress is measured by the improved quality of the lives of the women of Ontario.

I met a remarkable woman who endured 10 years of abuse. She tried to leave 11 times. Her husband forbade her from using the phone and from seeing her family, and forced their child to spy on her and then report. When she made that leap of faith to leave the abusive relationship, she phoned a shelter—a shelter that we, this government, support. The staff there helped her develop a safety plan and take the necessary precautions before leaving with her child. She is now safe, she is happy in a non-abusive relationship, and she has retrained for employment.

We're making progress in our implementation of our action plan, because it's built on the belief that insists that all women have the right to live free from fear and free from the threat of violence. In fact, just last week I attended the expansion of Ernestine's shelter right here in the Toronto area.

C'est une conviction que nous devons disséminer dans toute la province. It's a belief that we need to spread across the province. Le mois de novembre nous offre l'occasion spéciale de le faire. This month provides us with an opportunity to do just that.

1410

I am pleased that we're hosting the first Ontario-government-led conference on domestic violence here in Toronto on November 28 to 30, with space for 500 delegates and 1,000 registrants already. So we have problems aplenty. Our government will work together with North American experts, front-line workers and professionals to share information, to learn from each other and together learn how to work to address this problem.

There are many hard-working individuals who are dedicated to eradicating this problem of domestic violence, and they can often go unnoticed. I want to thank all of them for their hard work, for the compassion that they continue to show as they continue to help women and children across this province.

Sadly, while we know we've made significant strides forward, we also know how much more work there is to do. We as a government, and I know all members of this House, are committed to doing just that.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I rise in the House today to talk about a very sad but true reality in Ontario: drunk driving. This is an issue we must all work together to combat. At the same time, I'm proud to report that Ontario has the lowest rate of alcohol-related road deaths in Canada. Our government is doing everything we can to keep drunk drivers off Ontario roads.

This province already has some of the toughest anti-drinking-and-driving laws in the country, including stiff fines, licence suspension, mandatory remedial measures and an ignition interlock program.

Our government is also trying to address the fact that drinking drivers aged 18 to 21 are 25% more likely to be

involved in a collision than those aged 22 to 30. That is why my ministry targets new young drivers through Ontario's graduated licensing system. Our government has a zero tolerance policy for novice drivers. They must maintain a zero blood alcohol level while driving. A fully licensed driver who has a blood alcohol level of less than 0.05% must accompany them.

I would also like to note that our government recently passed legislation to protect young G2 drivers. Bill 73 restricts the number of teenage passengers they can carry between midnight and 5 a.m. Our research shows that new teenage drivers are almost three times more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious collision when they are carrying teenage passengers. In fact, the research shows the more teenage passengers, the higher the risk.

Our government also launched the iDRIVE campaign last year. It includes a video by and for young people to raise awareness about dangerous driving, including impaired driving. So far, 1,800 copies have been distributed to schools, community groups, public health offices and police.

When it comes to drunk driving, our government is looking at measures to discourage first-time offenders from becoming repeat offenders. We also want to target repeat and serious offenders. In short, our government is doing everything we can to keep drunk drivers off Ontario roads.

We are joined today by Carolyn Swinson, former president of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and Mary Sultana, the president of the Toronto chapter of MADD Canada. I want to welcome both of them to the Legislature.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the great work MADD Canada does to educate people and prevent impaired driving in this province and throughout Canada. Yesterday, I was pleased to help MADD Canada launch its annual Project Red Ribbon, along with my colleagues Minister Kwinter and Minister Bryant. MADD Canada is distributing four million red ribbons, and I'm sure all members of this House are aware of the red ribbons. Across this country this holiday season, the red ribbon is a sign of respect for the thousands of people who have lost their lives or have been injured as a result of impaired driving. By tying it on your vehicle, it serves as a commitment not to drink and drive and as a reminder to others. Tying a red ribbon on your car or key chain is also a good reminder. I know that all honourable members will want to join me in supporting MADD Canada by tying a red ribbon on their vehicle or on a key chain.

Ontario has the safest roads in North America, but the simple fact is that drunk driving costs lives—too many lives, in fact. In 2003, more than 200 people died and more than 500 were seriously hurt in collisions caused by drunk drivers. However, there is some encouraging news. The number of drinking and driving deaths is falling, down by about 35% in the last 10 years; and yet drinking and driving is still a factor in about one quarter of all fatal collisions in Ontario. That is why we have tough laws to stop people from drinking and driving, and that is

why our government is working with MADD Canada and other community groups and organizations to raise public awareness. We are doing this through holiday RIDE and other campaigns, as well as Project Red Ribbon.

I want to urge everyone in Ontario not to drink and drive this holiday season. Drinking and driving do not mix.

At the end, I want to ask for unanimous consent to make these red ribbons available to all members so they can join me in tying one on for safety.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Takhar has asked for unanimous consent to distribute the ribbons to all members. Agreed?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To wear them.

The Speaker: To wear them? All right.

CULTURAL PROTECTION PROTECTION CULTURELLE

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Ontarians and Canadians alike have great reason to celebrate. Since 1998, Canada has been leading efforts to develop an international convention governing cultural goods and services. It has worked to build international support for it through a broad range of international organizations. International consensus that cultural products and activities must be considered separately in matters of trade is now a matter of record.

On October 20, 2005, 148 member states of UNESCO voted in favour of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This historic accord recognizes in international law the distinctive nature of cultural goods and services as vehicles of cultural expression, identity and meaning. It clearly affirms the right of countries to have cultural policies and to take measures to protect and promote their cultural expressions, including national content quotas, subsidies, tax credits and foreign ownership rules.

1420

La convention affirme également le principe de non-subordination. Ceci signifie que le statut de la convention en matière de droit international sera égal aux autres traités internationaux, y compris aux accords commerciaux.

Je suis fière de vous annoncer que les provinces de l'Ontario et du Québec ont contribué de façon notable à ce succès canadien, en apportant un soutien crucial et des ressources vitales.

Ontario has demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate its support for the convention.

J'aimerais profiter de l'occasion pour féliciter la ministre du Patrimoine canadien, M^{me} Liza Frulla, pour son leadership inlassable, ainsi que ma collègue du gouvernement du Québec, M^{me} Line Beauchamp, pour son soutien indéfectible envers cette initiative.

J'aimerais également remercier la Coalition canadienne pour la diversité culturelle. En tant que voix de

l'industrie au Canada, la coalition a travaillé sans relâche pour promouvoir la convention sur la scène internationale et nationale.

En mai de cette année, le ministère de la Culture de l'Ontario a organisé une table ronde en collaboration avec des leaders de l'industrie culturelle afin de mieux sensibiliser le public à cet enjeu.

Our work is not over. The convention, in order to become a binding international instrument, must be ratified by at least 30 countries within the next year. Le Canada espère être l'un des premiers pays à ratifier la convention.

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is great news for Canada's and Ontario's arts and cultural industries. It is also important to each and every Ontario citizen, because it aims to promote ethnic traditions and minority languages and to protect local cultures from being overwhelmed by globalization trends.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I am very saddened today that this Liberal government has broken a tradition in this House by not allowing the opposition their five minutes to speak on the important issue of Wife Assault Prevention Month. We have always been given that opportunity, and for the minister to stand in this House and say that this is beyond being a partisan issue—it is, and it should be. But this government has chosen to take away the opportunity for us on the other side of the House to also express our serious concerns about the whole issue of Wife Assault Prevention Month. So much for an open government and a consultative government. This government just doesn't want to hear the truth.

However, on behalf of our caucus, I would like to recognize Wife Assault Prevention Month. Wife assault continues to be very widespread today despite the efforts of all three provincial parties over many years to do something about it. It crosses all demographic boundaries, it affects people of all ages, and unfortunately, the numbers continue to be high.

I would simply, in conclusion, urge all three parties to continue to work together, because if we're ever going to solve this problem, we have a responsibility to work in a coordinated fashion and make sure that women and children in this province can live in safety in their homes and their communities.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Indeed, it is a time to reflect upon what the minister has put before us today, recognizing the work done by MADD Canada. In fact, it draws to mind for me a personal story and a personal tragedy. Constable Terry Ryan was tragically killed in a two-car, alcohol-related crash on his way home from a police event in May 2002. Carol Ryan, his wife, is now a

director of MADD in Durham region. She, along with president Nancy Codlin, offers an opportunity for youth, and indeed people of all ages, to respect the efforts to educate the public. I commend them for their public service of advocacy and education. Durham region, of course, not at all different from other regions in the province, is a fine example of community participation on behalf of MADD Canada.

I also want to commend the minister for working with Julia Munro, the member from York North, and for her effort and her personal resolution on the roadside memorial signage resolution that has been endorsed unanimously in this House. I commend the ministry for working with Mrs. Munro to make that happen, along with MADD Canada. Those consultations, it's my understanding, are ongoing.

Indeed, John Tory and the opposition today give their commitment to work with you to recognize the toll on our roads. This is indeed a time that we'd all work together to tie one on for safety.

CULTURAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): First of all, let me say that receiving the news by the minister is certainly something that we on this side appreciate and support, because we as a caucus support preserving the culture and heritage of both Ontario and Canada. We recognize that it's an important thing to encourage our citizens to patronize our theatres and art galleries, and to provide educational opportunities to emphasize our history, our culture and our heritage.

However, I would underscore the fact that we on this side of the House would like to see this government make it a stronger priority. I reference the fact that if you are truly interested in preserving culture, then obviously the kinds of announcements that were made last spring to small-town libraries in our province created a great deal of uncertainty in an area that is so important for heritage and community life to be understood. I would say that this minister needs to impress upon the Minister of Government Services the importance of the archives, because they are preserving our culture.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I'm happy to respond to the minister's statement on abuse prevention month. I do want to take a quote right from the minister's five minutes today, after rejecting the New Democrats' proposal asking for the traditional all-party consent for each of us to take five minutes to talk about this important issue. The minister said, "Domestic violence is a concern that goes far beyond partisan politics. I know we all agree on the need not only to address it as an issue, but to shine a harsh light on it, so that all Ontarians can be mobilized in the effort to reduce it."

Well, what we saw happen here today is worse than what happened under the Harris government. I want to tell you, Minister, and the House leader of that party that

even under the Mike Harris government, with John Baird as the House leader, we would get up here and take the full five minutes to lambaste them, both the Liberal opposition and the NDP. But they would allow us to take our full five minutes, instead of making us divide three important statements today.

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean–Carleton): Shame on you.

Ms. Churley: Shame on you. Yes, you know I'm going to criticize you, because the minister herself said that this is an opportunity to "shine a harsh light" on this problem. There's no respect for the traditions in this place and the truly non-partisan aspect of talking about domestic abuse. I will shine a bit of a harsh light on the government's plan—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): As you should.

Ms. Churley: —as I should, because that's what we're here to do.

The minister gets up and brags in her statement about their plan. The plan actually does little to stop the cycle of violence for women and children already experiencing abuse. When in opposition and on the campaign trail, the Liberals insisted that they would listen to inquest reports, the coroner and experts to inform their blueprint to stop domestic violence. But what did they do when they got into power? It's broken promise after broken promise on issues like housing—Michael Prue can tell you about that—and poverty, both critical in breaking the cycle of violence, and not following through on measures like protecting women from re-offenders. The plan does not address how the cycle of violence is perpetuated, because there is an acute shortage of safe places where women and children can go to rebuild their lives.

Yes, last year I took my five minutes specifically to talk about the Liberals' broken promise, and urged them to fix it, on fully reinstating the funding which the Tories took away for second-stage housing. They promised that they would, and then in the plan broke that promise. Instead, the \$3.2 million has been spread around for a new program, which we all support.

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: Yeah, he's talking about increasing money for homelessness. We need money for housing for these women to go to. That's what we need. We need income supports for these women. That's the kind of thing we need to be talking about in a non-partisan way, looking at the real needs of these women and their children—children who are experiencing and watching the violence in their homes.

This is a massive, huge problem. The government did not reinstate that funding as promised. They are not building the affordable housing as promised. The minimum wage has not gone up appropriately. Welfare rates that the Tories cut by over 30%—just a 3% increase. Poverty is increasing. What do the Liberals do today? Not give the other opposition parties an opportunity to stand up and talk in depth to this issue. On that, I say shame on the women's issues minister and the Liberals for cutting this short today.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats join others in this assembly in applauding and thanking MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, for their leadership across the province and beyond in the battle against drunk driving and the carnage it leaves on our highways, and the incredible, destructive theft of life of young and old and its impact on communities and upon families.

Having said that, it's imperative that if we join together here thanking MADD, we also have to commit ourselves to ensuring that there's a sufficient police presence on our roadways to ensure that drunk drivers are detected and apprehended promptly before they take out innocent victims.

It's imperative as well that we halt this government's agenda of increasing the number of so-called agency stores where booze, liquor and beer, is being sold at anything from 7-Elevens to Avondales across southern Ontario, that we resist this government's agenda of privatizing and growing the number of liquor outlets across the province, in contrast to liquor being served and sold by experienced, trained professional OLBEU members. The government's agenda only serves—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. It is time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, on what page of yesterday's economic update can you point to a single initiative to help the over 42,000 families who have lost manufacturing jobs in Ontario so far this year? Which page of the statement?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): In the minister's statement, appendix 1, appendix 2, appendix 3, appendix 4, appendix 5, appendix 6—appendix 7 has no reference because that deals with the consultation process.

The facts remain: Employment is up, unemployment is down. We've created 77,000 new jobs this year. It's the government's overall economic policy undoing the damage you and your colleagues did that has allowed for that growth and is ensuring that Ontario is prepared to meet the challenges that are coming at us in the future.

Mr. Tory: The minister couldn't answer my question because there wasn't one single initiative, not a line anywhere, to help the over 42,000 families who have been devastated by these layoffs over the course of the past year.

It was very telling that when I asked the Premier last week about what his government was prepared to do to help these families and these communities experiencing these layoffs, he cited a good-news story about a company in Niagara Falls, only the company he referred to happens to be under criminal investigation for fraud and never opened. So that seems to be the sum total of what the Premier has to say on this.

Minister, on top of the 42,000 families without a pay-cheque who you seem to ignore, all families in Ontario are being forced to endure paying your McGuinty Liberal government \$2,000 more in taxes, charges and fees. They're working harder and finding it more difficult to get by. Can you point me to one line in your statement of yesterday, one line in this whole book, that gives any relief whatsoever to those people who are working harder and falling farther behind thanks to your taxes and charges?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Let's talk about the auto sector fund which that government refused to deal with. This government invested \$400 million to protect 19,000 manufacturing jobs and attract 1,800 new manufacturing jobs. Let me refer you to what Mr. Flaherty said about those programs. He said they didn't work. Let me refer you to what your party has said about that. They said they'd never do that sort of thing. We did that. It's in the budget. Read it more carefully. We've protected 18,000 jobs and created another 1,400 in the process. That's a record I'll put up against his record and his government's record any day.

Mr. Tory: I haven't formed a government yet, but I will. Just wait and see.

I take it from that answer that you're just going to stand here in the House today and you're going to read us your old lists again because you have no plan to help the families that have been devastated by these layoffs and you have no plan to help the people you have devastated with your taxes and charges. Worse than that, your own update—what it did show yesterday on page after page: GDP growth down 0.2%, exports down 1.4% since your last budget, retail sales down 0.9%, housing starts down 0.8%, personal income down 0.4%, wages and salaries down 0.7%, job creation down by 28,000 jobs, and the deficit up by \$800 million.

We've heard all of your old lists many times. What are you going to do about these disturbing current trends that are affecting people in this province today?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: That is the best example of Tory math I've heard since Ernie Eves sat in this House. Do you know what he's referring as the rate of growth? The rate of growth is up on all of those items next year. Have a closer look. Exports, GDP growth, retail sales, housing starts, corporate profits, personal income and job creation are all up. Unemployment is down; employment is up. What should be up is up and what should be down is down. We're undoing the mess that that member and his government created in this province throughout the last nine years.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Tory: The rate of unemployment in Ontario was above the national average for several months this year for the first time since World War II. I notice you never mentioned that.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters issued a stark report on manufacturing and the economy in our country. The report says that manufacturers are facing the most dire prospects in a decade, and they blame higher energy costs, the higher dollar and high taxes. Alexandria Moulding in Cornwall added 45 more job losses last month to the more than 1,500 jobs that have disappeared around the Cornwall area in the last 18 months, according to the Cornwall Standard Freeholder; and 180 employees of Satisfied Brake Products were also told that by the end of this month they will have no paycheque.

Minister, why did you fail absolutely, completely and totally to address these 1,500 people who are losing their jobs around Cornwall and the 42,000 people who have lost their jobs across the province of Ontario in manufacturing so far this year? Why did you leave them out of your statement completely?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: In fact, we addressed the same concerns that the manufacturers did in our statement: specifically, the value of the US dollar, energy prices, the state of the US economy. The fact remains that those are challenges. We said that. What I'll say is this: that by investing in education and health care, we will improve the productivity of our economy and create jobs. We will attract new investment: Just like we attracted Toyota to Woodstock; just like the Bruce deal will create 1,500 new jobs; just like the recent GlaxoSmithKline announcement, a \$23-million expansion in Mississauga; just like Koei, a Japanese software entertainment company opening up 200 jobs within three years, 600 new jobs in Cornwall.

This government's policy is on track. It's meeting the challenge of the future, and it's doing it in a way that will ensure prosperity and protect working people from the kinds of situations they found themselves in as a result of the policy of his government—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tory: High energy costs and high taxes are key factors over which you have direct control. Last week, Bombardier confirmed it will spend \$235 million on a new plant in Mexico. Employees at the Downsview plant here in Toronto were told that their jobs will likely be outsourced. Imperial Tobacco announced last month they were closing their plants in Guelph and Aylmer, laying off 635 employees. Instead, jobs are being created in Mexico. Last month in Hamilton, Rheem Canada announced the closure of its plant. It will be shifting its production to Mexico. One hundred and fifty people will be without work. I hear that the Mexican Chamber of Commerce is giving consideration to you as Man of the Year.

1440

Why did you fail to outline any specific measures in your economic statement yesterday about the recent loss

of almost 800 jobs in Guelph, Aylmer and Hamilton, possibly more in Downsview, and the 42,000 jobs lost so far this year across this province? Why did you fail to address it?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Let me remind the Leader of the Opposition that since we took office, there have been 193,000 new jobs in Ontario—77,000 this year alone. For the first time since the 1980s, a new automotive plant in Ontario is coming from Toyota. The list that I read off in my second supplementary about the investments that are happening—their party refused to interact with the investing community and the manufacturers. They repeatedly refused to do that. We've responded. Our actions this year have protected 18,000 jobs, leading to the creation of another 1,800. I'd stack this government's record up against his government's any day.

The economy is growing and the deficit is down. This government is on track and is serving the people well through its economic policies.

Mr. Tory: Again to the Minister of Finance: Your own economic statement pointed to worsening economic conditions in Ontario. Earlier, we recited trend after trend that is down, between your budget and the statement. You completely failed to address the burden that has been placed on hard-working taxpayers across this province, who are working harder and paying your fees.

It's no wonder 42,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost. In Corunna, Ontario, outside of Sarnia, 35 employees at the Glis plant were told that their jobs would be lost. On September 30, in St. Catharines, 212 people lost their jobs when the Ferranti-Packard Transformers plant closed for good. Last month, 89 employees at the Harrowsmith cheese plant outside of Kingston were told their factory was closing. This is the pattern we are seeing across Ontario under the watch of your government.

Why did you fail to outline any specific measures at all in your economic statement to address the job losses in Harrowsmith, St. Catharines, Sarnia, Hamilton and Cornwall, and the 42,000 others across this province? Why did you fail to do that?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I believe 77,000 net new jobs in Ontario this year is a darned good record, and one that will stand up against—

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: He may want to put Ontarians down, but we're going to build Ontario up. We're building Ontario up with a \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education. That will improve productivity. He himself endorsed our economic plan last March when he said that it may take three or four years to balance the budget. That's what he said. One day he says one thing, another day he says another. The deficit is down; growth is up. Employment is up; unemployment is down. What should be up is up, what should be down is down. We're undoing the mess that your government left us with, and we're doing it well, by eliminating your \$5.5-billion deficit and creating 77,000 net new jobs this year in Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Acting Premier. The McGuinty government's budget plans for Ontario hospitals should be called the hidden hit list. Despite \$2 billion in new federal money for health care and \$2.4 billion of new money from your regressive and unfair health tax, reports suggest that the McGuinty government will force half of Ontario's underfunded hospitals to cut health services. Acting Premier, will the McGuinty government make your hospital budget plans public today so that ordinary families can see what important hospital services are at risk of being cut?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I think the member opposite evinces some confusion. He knows that in fact there has been an enormous investment of some 2.2 billion new dollars into our hospitals under this government. He knows that it stands in stark contrast with the record of his own government. What has happened is an orderly process across the province, where hospitals are working with Ministry of Health staff and local authorities to make sure that they can balance their budgets and meet the tough targets we have to improve health care.

That is being worked out on a community-by-community basis. For the first time, they have multi-year funding, some confidence in terms of projecting forward how they are going to be able to do that, and the hospitals are having to sign accountability agreements to make sure they are able to provide the services and stay within budget.

We would say that this is a reasonable approach. Some 60% of hospitals have already arrived at a successful conclusion; there is more work still to be done.

Mr. Hampton: The Acting Premier says this is an orderly approach. Here is what is facing Bluewater Health in Sarnia. This is what they have been told will be cut: 169 hospital workers and nurses to be laid off, operating room times slashed, palliative care eliminated. I wonder, does that sound like an orderly process to people?

Acting Premier, if you won't make your budget plans public, will the McGuinty government guarantee ordinary families that important hospital services like these will not be cut?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The leader of the third party's list sounds like the kinds of things that happened under the NDP government. In fact, it sounds like what happened with the \$268-million cut to hospitals that the NDP government engineered. Some 11,000 beds were closed under that government. Those are the kinds of things they did.

In Sarnia, the palliative care unit is open, not surprisingly in contrast to what the member opposite is saying, and we're also opening a hospice unit.

There is an overall approach taken to health care, an approach that is credentialized by the fact that \$2.2 billion more is available to hospitals and being used to im-

prove services in the system. We're not afraid to make improvements; we're not afraid to make changes. We are doing that, working with local communities, and making sure that all of the health services add up to the highest-quality care possible. That will be true in Sarnia, and it is true in all the other—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: It will be a real revelation for the people of Sarnia to find that the McGuinty government calls eliminating palliative care and laying off 169 hospital workers orderly improvement of their health care system.

Here is the reality: Half of the hospitals in Ontario say that unless they get adequate funding from the McGuinty government, they will be forced to cut hospital services. For patients, that means fewer nurses, closed hospital wards, longer waits and reduced emergency services. Is this what you call orderly progress?

If the McGuinty government is determined to keep its hospital hit list secret, if the McGuinty government refuses to guarantee no cuts, would you at least tell people across Ontario what health care services the McGuinty government is telling hospitals to cut first?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Quite the contrary; what we're saying to hospitals is that they have support to improve services. In fact, we're saying there is a 42% increase in MRI scans—some 116,000 more—an 8% increase in CT scans and a 20% increase in hip and knee surgeries provided by hospitals across this province. You wouldn't know that from what the member opposite is saying. You wouldn't know, as well, that there is a 17% increase in cardiac surgeries, a 16% increase in cataract surgeries and an 11% increase in cancer surgeries taking place in hospitals all across this province. It isn't the picture being portrayed by the member opposite, simply because the picture the member opposite portrays isn't the facts of what is taking place.

Sarnia still has its palliative care open. There are active discussions taking place, trying to find their best solutions for that community. They have already been found in 60% of the hospitals across the province and, for the first year, it's being done under multi-year, certain funding, increased funding—quite a contrast to the conditions the member opposite would remember when he served in cabinet.

1450

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the Acting Premier. The people of Sarnia will be interested to know that you refer to these cuts as making the hospital system better in their community.

I wanted to ask the Acting Premier this: When did the McGuinty government announce a declaration of emergency over the tainted water crisis at Kashechewan First Nation?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): The McGuinty government made its declaration in this

past week. I'm sorry I don't have the exact date and time here. I will endeavour to get it for the member opposite.

On October 15, Chief Friday announced an emergency, and he received support for that from the provincial government. As you're aware, an agreement arrived at under the NDP government and the federal government gave that authority and responsibility to the provincial government. It was exercised by this government in order to protect the citizens of Kashechewan.

Mr. Hampton: Well, for the record, your government didn't declare a state of emergency until October 25. That's when your minister responsible for aboriginal affairs looked into the camera and said, "We just found this out today." In fact, Chief Friday from Kashechewan First Nation faxed the following band council resolution to Emergency Measures Ontario on October 13. It reads:

"Whereas the Kashechewan First Nation chief and council decided to make a declaration of emergency...."

"Whereas the Kashechewan First Nation community does not have any ... source of safe and clean consumable water ..."

"Therefore be it resolved that individuals affected by water-related illnesses be medi-vaced out for immediate treatment and that Emergency Management Ontario ... officials be brought in to assess the crisis situation."

He asked you on October 13 for a declaration of emergency. You say you didn't find out about it until the 24th. What happened here, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I think the people of Ontario and the people of Kashechewan are well aware that this government didn't dawdle like past governments did, didn't use the jurisdictional excuse, didn't try to slough off what was happening in terms of a real human condition in this particular community. Instead, the Premier of this province made a courageous decision in saying that he wouldn't worry about what was politic, he wouldn't worry about anything but the welfare and the well-being of these particular citizens of Ontario.

They received the respect that they deserve as citizens of this province, and right now, the emergency services commissioner, Fantino, and the Emergency Measures Organization are leading an orderly evacuation, ensuring that there are medical services, first of all, and school services. We're glad to report that children will be in school today and tomorrow, receiving the kinds of things that the Premier and this government decided had to happen. A state of emergency was declared as soon as we were aware that the conditions were met to require that and that the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Here is the quote from the 1992 memorandum of understanding. It says, "Ontario agrees to provide emergency assistance to First Nation communities within Ontario ... emergency preparedness will be provided when requested by a First Nation community."

On October 13, Chief Friday sent this very clear fax to Emergency Measures Ontario. On October 15, he sent a

follow-up, a very clear fax, "Declaration of Emergency," to Emergency Measures Ontario. Your minister responsible for aboriginal affairs went on television on October 24 and said, "Oh, we just found out about this now."

Acting Premier, who dropped the ball, Emergency Measures Ontario or the McGuinty government once again?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Thankfully, no one has dropped the ball. In fact, we're carrying the ball exactly the way it should be carried. We're making sure that things are happening for the citizens of Kashechewan. After a long back-and-forth between the various authorities involved, we did declare a state of emergency. We did enact an evacuation. The citizens have been moved from a state that was hazardous to their health and well-being, and they are receiving the comfort and support that they should.

There's a five-point plan that the federal government has put together to advance them. It was triggered in part, I guess, by the decisions that were made by the provincial government. We accept that that is going to move forward what needs to be done. The state of emergency is what we were asked to do and what we did deliver. There is now a state of, I believe, improving conditions being worked on for those citizens, the way there should be and the way this province is pleased to have helped to facilitate.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, one of the strongest requirements, greatest requirements, for business, industry and people in the province of Ontario is a confidence in the reliability of their electricity supply.

In June 2004, the former minister announced with great fanfare an RFP process for 2,500 megawatts of electricity. In April and May of 2005, he announced the winners: Eastern Power, for 560 megawatts in Mississauga—two plants of 280 each in Mississauga; and St. Clair Power, for 570 megawatts in the Sarnia–Lambton area.

Minister, what is the status of these new plants?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): Thank you for the question. I'm pleased to be able to respond, as I did yesterday, that as of October 17, 2005, St. Clair township approved the site plan for Calpine's 1,005-megawatt facility.

Mr. Yakabuski: It's apparent that the government's energy policy and their announcements have the shelf life of a quart of milk. You see currently, today, on November 4, the Sarnia plant is under an OMB hearing for rezoning because the township denied access, or a change of zoning, for that.

I did ask about the Mississauga plants but the minister did not touch them. We don't hear about the unannouncements; we only hear about the announcements. The northern power plant was nixed quietly in August, and

the southern power plant is under a great deal of opposition in the community.

I ask the minister again, what is happening with these plants? The people of Ontario need to know where we're going with our electricity policy.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: With Inver Energy, they are in the process of looking at two new sites with the township. We're pleased that they're continuing with that. In terms of Greenfield they're going through their EA process, which I know the honourable member supports and believes in.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is for the Acting Premier as follow-up to the question put to you by my leader. I want to know, and more importantly, the people of Kashechewan First Nation want to know, when the band council passed a resolution and faxed the resolution to Emergency Measures Ontario, an agency of this provincial government, why you did not take seriously the declaration that was issued by that community and didn't immediately take action in order to medevac those people out of that community on October 14. Was it because you're uninterested or was it because they happen to be people of the First Nation community?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I won't dignify the allegation implied in that comment with a direct response; only to say that there has been a fully respectful response made to Kashechewan First Nation. When our Premier met with the chief and learned of the conditions, when the province became fully apprised of how things were that required the action of the province, this province acted. It acted in favour of the citizens of that reserve; it acted to make sure that positive things would happen for them. It happened in a fashion that I believe is appropriate and that this government believes is appropriate to exercise, notwithstanding other jurisdictional implications. We continue to provide health services. We are providing educational services in tandem with the teachers from Inet. We will continue through our actions—not through rhetoric, not through boisterous intervention after the fact, but rather through our actions—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Bisson: Acting Premier, that just doesn't cut it. The community is frustrated and the community is mad for a good reason. They feel they were not taken seriously. They knew that their citizens were getting sick. They contacted the federal government, which did nothing, and they sent you two faxes saying that they wanted a state of emergency declared in their community on October 14 and 15, and you did nothing. It wasn't until the chief showed up here, along with Grand Chief Stan Louttit, and had to show pictures of sick children that your government took action. I ask you again, why does it take the chief of a community to come down to

Queen's Park and show pictures of sick children to make this government act? And what happened for the first 13 days?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I say to the member opposite, what does it take to change his tone, when he gets immediate reaction from ministers of this government who accompany him, when he thanks them publicly for what they have done, and then allows his comments to be used and turned around in a political fashion? Last week he said thanks to the province for having acted. This week he is trying to make political capital out of a situation that deserves none. I recognize the member opposite for having acted on behalf of his constituents, but he should recognize what he said last week. This government did the right thing in the right circumstances, and to play around, as he is doing today, is simply to make politics out of a situation that doesn't deserve it.

1500

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is to the Minister of Health Promotion. As anyone in this House who has spent any time with me over the last few days knows, I recently had a baby that I can't stop talking about. Newborn babies are, of course, one of our province's most precious resources, and we have a duty to protect their health. As we speak, the Minister of Health is in Ottawa, the home town of the Minister of Health Promotion, making an important announcement that involves provincial newborn screening programs. I'm wondering if the Minister of Health Promotion can outline to the Legislature the implications of the announcement and its contents.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to congratulate the honourable member from Kitchener Centre and Sara, and particularly welcome John Patrick Milloy to this province.

I'm very pleased to report that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is in fact in my home town making an important announcement to create a state-of-the-art provincial screening facility at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario—CHEO. It's a major victory for the health and well-being of young people in this province.

In September, we announced an increase in screening from two to 21 inherited metabolic disorders, the first improvement in screening in 27 years. This government pledged not too long ago that we would go from worst to first when it came to newborn screening in the province of Ontario, and we have delivered on that promise right at the wonderful, world-class Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

Mr. Milloy: I want to thank the minister and just tell him in passing that I plan to take advantage of the 15-day, money-back guarantee on the birth certificate.

On a serious note, these tests are very important and will bring peace of mind to a lot of parents and allow doctors to make early diagnoses in order to treat an array of life-altering diseases that might otherwise catch health

professionals and families of newborn children off guard. With so many health concerns related to preventable diseases, I was wondering if the minister could tell us how his ministry is addressing issues that are not revealed in these tests, but are just as important as children grow older.

Hon. Mr. Watson: One of the priorities of our ministry is working with Dr. Sheela Basrur, who just about a year ago put out a very good report called Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives. It talked about the challenge facing young people, and children in particular, with respect to obesity. There's been a 300% increase in obesity rates among children in Canada in the last 25 years. For the first time, kids are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, which can add to some challenges with respect to heart failure and other debilitating diseases. So we're going to be announcing in the next couple of months an action plan to implement recommendations brought forward by Dr. Basrur, because we believe the epidemic of obesity among children is something we have to deal with in short order, quite frankly, because it is going to be an enormous strain on the individual children, but also on the health care system down the road.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Minister of Finance: Minister, I'm sure you're aware of the vulnerability of taxpayers in Ontario. In 1997 the average person's loans, mortgage, credit card debt and financial liabilities equalled their entire annual after-tax income, plus an additional 6%. Today, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, those debts are 124.5% of their income. They are extremely vulnerable to expected interest rate hikes in the oncoming year. That typical working family is also dealing with a big tax increase courtesy of Dalton McGuinty, a big hydro increase courtesy of Dalton McGuinty, higher gas prices and higher home heating prices. Minister, what hope was there in your economic statement to give these working families some sort of break?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The hope is that we have a strong economy that has grown in the last year and is going to continue to grow for the next three years. The hope is that unemployment is down. It is down to its lowest level since 2001. The hope is that employment is up, and the other hope is that real incomes are up. Finally, the hope is that this government is investing in post-secondary education, health care and economic infrastructure to undo the damage his government did when it threw away the most prosperous years this province has seen in many years.

Mr. Hudak: Minister, the answers you give—I know you don't have an answer and you resort to political bluster, but quite frankly, there is no solace there, no sense of comfort for working families in the province of Ontario.

I don't need to remind you that when you were energy minister, you increased energy hydro rates by some 28%,

with a big surprise coming in 2006 with another 30% increase in hydro prices. You're presiding over a budget with \$13 billion, awash in revenue since you've taken office—higher taxes, higher hydro, higher user fees and higher gas prices. Working families now have \$2,000 less in their pockets than they did when Dalton McGuinty took office, and on top of that, vulnerability on interest rates. Minister, if you're not going to cut them a break, what kind of advice can you give to working families that are struggling to make ends meet?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The Tories left a legacy of mismanagement that's second only to the NDP between 1990 and 1995. Some 2,000 megawatts of electricity came offline while they were the government of Ontario, while they were asleep at the switch. We're cleaning up that mess every day. You know what? Expenses went up 21% under that government, while revenues didn't go up anywhere near that, and left us with a \$5.5-billion deficit. That's their record of mismanagement. They ran up a deficit. They starved health care and they starved education. We're reinvesting in those priorities. Our priorities are about education and health care. Unlike your leader, we will not cut \$2.4 billion from the health care system. We believe those investments are crucial to the future productivity of this province and to its future security, economically and socially.

CHEDOKE LONG-TERM-CARE FACILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): In the absence of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, I'll direct my question to the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, when your government decided to close the Chedoke complex continuing care centre and not build the long-promised new complex continuing care centre, patients and family members were promised there would be no change to their current fee structure and no additional costs would be levied against them and their families.

That promise has been broken. In addition to the serious concerns patients have over the level of care they're receiving, some are also being gouged as much as \$1,480 per month in residential fees. Will you take immediate action to withdraw these fees and ensure that all medical costs for these patients, including the rooms at their new facilities, remain as they were before the transfers, as promised?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I think as the member knows, having asked the question before, that the Hamilton hospital officials came up with a plan. They're dealing with a surplus in their community of complex continuing care beds, and making sure that the cases that were at Chedoke, those people, have a place to go to. All the residents got a medical assessment. That assessment was worked out with the individuals and their families. The residents were either transferred to another complex continuing care facility at St. Peter's or St. Joseph's, or to a long-term-care home.

The transfer decision to go to a long-term-care home is voluntary, the decision of the resident and his or her family. Even there, they can change their minds; they're not obliged to do it. They can request a transfer to a complex continuing care unit, the same type of care under the same conditions they had at Chedoke. The member knows this. It is available to those families. That answer stands and is available to those families today.

1510

Ms. Horwath: Unfortunately, the Acting Premier was looking at the wrong briefing note, because I wasn't asking about the facilities in terms of the question I asked the other day. Now I'm asking about the fact that your government promised that they would not face any further fees. I'm going to read to you from a letter that was sent to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. It's a quote from one of these patients' family members:

"For the past 20 years that my husband has been at the Chedoke complex continuing care centre in Hamilton, the province has covered all expenses. What has changed? At one of our meetings of our family association members, when officials spoke to us it was stated that there would be no change in costs—whatever we had at Chedoke would stay the same at any facility."

Will this government fix the horrible situation that exists now and keep its promise to these families and patients that they would not suffer financially from these imposed transfers?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: There is a difference in what is put forward by the selection of the word "forced." These transfers have been offered up as choices, instead, that the families and the patients have. There is a difference, as the member opposite knows, in terms of those who chose to go to long-term-care facilities and those who went to continuing complex care. But I want to make it absolutely clear again. I believe the member is clear on this, but I want to make absolutely sure that the families and people in Ontario know that they are able to stay in complex continuing care where the kinds of fees that may apply in a long-term-care setting, which are then based on ability to pay, do not apply.

There are 13 families who have chosen long-term care and are waiting for placement. It was a choice that they made. If they change their minds, whether it's because of fees or other conditions, they're free to do so, and they will be facilitated into similar complex continuing care to that which they had before.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Let me begin by congratulating the minister on his first economic statement, a statement that clearly demonstrates that under the McGuinty government, there's no question that we're heading in the right direction here in Ontario.

While I realize the McGuinty government is doing an extraordinary job cleaning up the Tories' fiscal mess and putting the finances of the province back in order, there's no question that Ontario is facing a number of risks that

are beyond our control. These risks certainly have the potential to impact our economy: oil prices, the value of the Canadian dollar and the US economy all have a big impact. Can the minister outline how he has accounted for these risks in his fiscal plan to ensure that the great work the McGuinty government is doing to bring prosperity to Ontario can continue?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The member raised a valid point, and unlike the opposition, he's got his facts straight. It's true: the price of oil has gone up and the value of the Canadian dollar is higher. However, a prudent government makes provisions for these challenges. We have a \$1-billion reserve fund this year; we're increasing that reserve to \$1.5 billion next year. The deficit this year is down \$400 million from where we projected it would be in our spring budget. If we don't have to use the reserve, the deficit will be \$1.4 billion. We are on track to eliminate the deficit by 2008-09, and if we don't have to use the reserve in either of those two years, the deficit will be eliminated by 2007-08.

Mr. Duguid: None of us want to see any Ontarian lose their job. In my riding over the years, I've known some constituents who have experienced the pain of being laid off, and nobody wants to see that happen to anybody. At the same time, it's not a perfect world, and adjustments in the workplace have to be made due to the economy and other things. From time to time, that will lead to layoffs. While, unfortunately, some jobs have been lost, it must also be noted that many others have been created. The opposition is wrongly getting people to believe that there are only job losses and no such thing as job growth. That's simply not true. Can the minister explain, based on his economic update yesterday, what the province can expect in terms of job growth?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We have created 193,000 net new jobs since we took office. The unemployment rate is currently 6.4%. I also want to add that the working men and women of this province and our small businesses have kicked in to improve Ontario's productivity. Under the Tories, productivity was among the lowest in North America. The gap between Ontario and the US doubled under the Tories. Thanks to our small businesses, thanks to the working men and women of this province, our productivity has improved.

Finally, members opposite may not know this, but Ontario has the second-highest number of manufacturing employees of any jurisdiction in North America, second only to California. And let's look at this: In 2003, the last year of the Tory government, Ontario ranked 16th in terms of overall manufacturing employment; in 2004, our first year of government, we moved up to third. That's a record I'd put up against theirs any day of the week.

NEWBORN SCREENING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question I would have ordinarily directed to the Minister of Health Promotion, because he was answering on this earlier, but I'll instead direct it to the—

Interjection.

Mr. Tory: Is he on the precinct, Mr. Speaker? He was here.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Will you stop the clock for a moment and determine if he has just stepped out for a second?

Interjection.

The Speaker: He's not here? New question.

Mr. Tory: I'll direct the question to the Acting Premier. Can the Acting Premier confirm what I'm reading from the Minister of Health's press release from this afternoon concerning newborn screening: that the newborn screening program at CHEO will be in operation by March 2006, with all the tests for the different disorders being performed by the end of 2006? Is that the date on which these new tests, including, in particular, sickle-cell disorder, will be performed under the government's new program?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): Yes, it is. The answer is yes.

Mr. Tory: In light of that fact, since the minister has confirmed the date is going to be at the end of 2006, I wonder if the minister might commit to this House, right here and now, on behalf of the government in his capacity as Acting Premier, that since there are babies being born today, in particular with sickle-cell anemia and some of these other disorders, who are not being screened in Ontario, and since it's a simple and relatively inexpensive matter to send those test samples out of Ontario, if necessary, to have it done elsewhere, as is done every day in other places, to have this government start now or within a reasonable period of time—to have a quick start, say, in 30 or 60 days—to get that testing going before the end of 2006, so more people aren't exposed to not being screened in the meantime.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'm sure that the people of Ontario need to appreciate the context of the member opposite's question, that this is the first update to newborn screening in 27 years. In fact, Minister Smitherman announced 19 new tests in September, and today he's adding another six, which brings us up to 27, including sickle-cell anemia tests. We're also announcing \$18 million for a state-of-the-art newborn screening facility at CHEO. It will take time; it will be phased in.

What all new parents in the province, like my colleague Mr. Milloy, need to know is that they will be better protected from those foreseeable diseases, those foreseeable calamities, that could overtake their infants than ever before in the province of Ontario. We have in Minister Smitherman someone who has carefully invested both the dollars and the faith of the people of this province into making health care better. Infants will be better protected. We'll be implementing this program as quickly as possible to—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

I'm going to ask you the same question that I have repeatedly asked you—in fact, on October 25, 2004, on November 3, 2004, and on October 25, 2005—and for which I have yet to receive an answer. The tenants of Ontario want to know—in fact, I think everyone in this House wants to know—about the repeal of the Tenant Protection Act. You promised this would happen within one year of your taking office. You've missed that deadline by 14 months. The tenants are waiting, their advocates are waiting, and, quite simply, we need an answer. Will you stop listening to the landlord advocates and introduce real rent controls that will protect tenants from higher rents, rising eviction rates, poor maintenance and spiralling energy costs?

1520

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I will once again repeat to this member the statement I've made in this House on a number of occasions, and that is that we are still looking at the situation. We did go through an extensive consultation process a year or so ago, as he well knows, and we got an awful lot of valuable information during that period of time. We will be acting on that information and we will be changing the Tenant Protection Act.

But let's also talk about some of the programs that we have initiated since we became the government. The first program we initiated was the rent bank, which helps people who are in rental emergency situations. We started the Toronto pilot project, which made 400 housing units available, through housing allowances, for low-income individuals. We had historic low-rent guidelines introduced for both 2005 and 2006, in the range of 1.5% and 2.1%, which were the lowest on record. We have done a lot, and we will be doing a lot in the future—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Prue: For the fourth occasion in a row now, we have had a non-response. The question that is being asked is, what date are you going to introduce this legislation? Is Carol Goar correct when she assumes that you don't care about the 32% of Ontarians who rent because, as she put it, they don't vote in blocks and they move more often? Is that the reality? Or is your parliamentary assistant right when he says it's not on the agenda for the balance of this year? We want to know, do you have a date that you're going to introduce it? And, if so, what is that date?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I can tell the member this, because I know he has an interest in housing, and so do we on this side of the House: For the first time in almost 10 years the government of Ontario has taken a position with respect to the affordable housing program. We decided to match the \$301 million that the federal government put up with \$301 million of provincial monies, to make sure we have an affordable housing program that works. Through that program, we just recently announced 5,000 units of affordable housing through housing allowance programs for low-income individuals and another 5,000 new units that will be built as soon as they

are approved. Presently, the allocations are out across the entire province to the housing service providers.

We are doing something about the situation here in Ontario. We are very pleased to be back in the housing business again, and the people of Ontario will benefit from that. The member will be hearing on the issues that he's talking about very soon.

WORKPLACE SAFETY FOR STUDENTS

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Young people like the ones who join us today in the gallery for Take Our Kids to Work Day are among those at greatest risk for the most severe workplace injuries, which can result in lifelong disability or end their lives prematurely. According to the Institute for Work and Health in Ontario, workplace injuries to young and new workers are six times more likely to occur in their first month of employment than at any other time. Further, I understand that last year over 49,000 young workers were injured on the job. That seems like a large number, considering that not all young people are employed. Minister, can you tell our guests today, what is your strategy to protect our young children and kids?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): We want to thank everybody up in the media gallery for participating in the program today: Jenny Shrewsbury-Gee, Anthony D'Elia, Neville Britto, Natalie Lolua and Joel Mundell, who are still here. We appreciate that they're here. We appreciate that employees have taken part in this as well.

Young worker health and safety should be a priority for every one of us in this room because, quite frankly, in 2004, seven workers under the age of 25 were killed and 49,000 workers under the age of 25 were injured on the job, and that's just not acceptable. There needs to be an onus on every employer in this province to make sure that they have a health and safety strategy in place, that they have a plan there for young workers, because these are our future employees. These are employees who are going to be able to take the skills that we can teach them today in their workplaces and carry that forward.

It's a huge priority for us as a government. It should be a priority for every employer in this province, and we encourage them.

Mr. Ramal: Our young people deserve the best start in life, and that includes a safe workplace. We want Ontarians to remember their first job positively. The initiatives you have listed are important to ensuring that. What information can I share with my constituents, young workers, parents and employers, to help build upon the important work the Ministry of Labour is doing?

Hon. Mr. Peters: There are a couple of great Web sites that we would encourage people to look to: worksmart.ca and youngworker.ca. As well, we're working very closely with the Ministry of Education on the curriculum from grades 9 to 12. We're teaching young workers the importance of health and safety.

We're also moving forward and hiring 200 new inspectors in this province. With these new inspectors, one of the things they are looking at when they go in to visit workplaces is what programs they have in place for orientation, training and supervision. It's extremely important for families in this room who are parents of children working in a workplace. Ask your child about the workplace and any hazards that may exist.

We need to make sure that it gets through to our young people that the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act apply to them as well. When they begin a new job, they should ask for orientation so that they know they have the ability to say no to unsafe work in their workplace. It's incumbent on all of us: Employees, parents and young people all have a role to play in this.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is also for the Minister of Labour. Last Saturday, it was reported in the Stratford Beacon Herald that there was a mid-morning house fire on October 20 in the community of Shakespeare in the riding of Perth-Middlesex, which caused major damage and killed a family pet.

According to the article, the local volunteer fire department had trouble mustering enough firefighters to meet minimum provincial response guidelines and had to ask for help from its Milverton affiliate, 20 minutes away. This emergency occurred while two double-hatter firefighters, who otherwise would have responded to this emergency, were forced to sit at home in Shakespeare with their pagers off because their union recently charged them with the so-called offence of serving as a volunteer firefighter on their time off.

In this same article, the Ontario fire marshal is quoted as saying, "I think there should be legislation," meaning legislation to uphold a double-hatter's right to volunteer. This is a public safety issue, but it's also a labour issue. When will the government demonstrate concern for public safety in rural Ontario, take the fire marshal's advice and—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked. The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): On behalf of the government, we express our condolences to the families involved in this situation.

As the government, we recognize and value the hard work and dedication of our firefighters in this province. We realize that fire services in our community are important, including the vital role that volunteer firefighters play. They are vital for the provision of services to many of our smaller communities. Firefighters, fire chiefs and municipalities need to work co-operatively to resolve this issue. We are confident that with that leadership, they're going to do exactly that. The Office of the Fire Marshal is continuing to monitor this situation, to ensure there are no serious threats to public safety.

Again, I remind the honourable member that he had the opportunity, when they were in government, to deal with this issue. We're moving forward on ensuring that open dialogue continues between the municipalities, the fire departments and the fire marshal's office.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): This is a huge problem in the Ottawa Valley. Just outside of the boundaries of the city of Ottawa, we have many volunteer firefighters who also have professional jobs in the city of Ottawa. This was found in the nearby town of Kemptville where they lost four volunteers and a senior captain with 22 years of experience because of this ruling.

The local union says that it really hasn't got a lot of objection to this, but it's the American control over the local fire union which is demanding this. Minister, do you believe that an American union boss should dictate to Canadian professional firefighters what they can do in their spare time?

Hon. Mr. Peters: Unlike what is being proposed right there and what the member from Leeds-Grenville failed to move this issue forward on, we're not about to interfere in a collective bargaining process in this province. I think you said it: We're going down an extremely dangerous path if he's advocating that we start to involve ourselves in collective bargaining. We're advocating to the fire associations in this province that we're not going to interfere in the collective bargaining process. But we remain confident that fire chiefs, volunteer firefighters and professional firefighters in this province are going to continue to work together independently, to continue their dialogue at moving forward to find a co-operative solution to this issue. We've asked the fire marshal's office, through the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, that if there are some serious community issues—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

1530

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Acting Premier. In this post-Gomery world, people want politicians to clean up their act, especially when it comes to Liberals these days. Tonight, yet again, the Liberal Party of Ontario will be selling access to the Premier of Ontario for anyone with \$4,000 to spare. You've repeatedly claimed that the public has a right to know in real time who's donating to Ontario's political parties. Will you release today the list of movers and shakers who have coughed up the big bucks to dine with the Premier?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): To the Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the honourable member for my first real question since my new role. It's exactly because of

questions like this and the very perceptions that are out there these last couple of years about all of us, about politicians—we're all painted with the same brush—that this government has begun to take steps to address these perceptions and to win back the trust of the public. As the honourable member knows—she was at the committee hearings—we have introduced Bill 214, which went through clause-by-clause, where any donations of \$100 or more to political parties will be disclosed, after the amendments from the committee, to Elections Ontario after 10 days, and then will be on a Web site 10 days after that. This will address a lot of those questions the honourable member has raised.

PETITIONS

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton): I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I support the petition and affix my signature.

BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): "Whereas we, the visible minority of rural northwestern Ontario within the unorganized townships of Kaministiquia, require our basic inherited right to subdivide our land, along with immediate and continued government funding to ensure our roads and bridges are safe for our daily travels...."

"Your immediate intervention is needed. The two bridges crossing the Dog River exemplify our heritage as a logging and farming community. Built by our ancestors, the bridges are a necessity. Our first bridge was replaced in 1977 with an inadequate narrow Bailey bridge with weight and width restrictions. The other bridge is currently closed, and slated for demolition. This

bridge was closed to vehicle traffic in 1985, but was used extensively for pedestrian, snowmobile, ATV, horse and bicycle traffic until March 2005. Now it is closed to all traffic.

"Please help reunite our rural community by allocating sufficient funds to repair the two community bridges to the capacity in which they were intended for, and reunite our rural community."

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gasoline prices have continued to increase at alarming rates in recent months; and

"Whereas the high and unstable gas prices across Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship to Ontario's drivers while also impacting the Ontario economy in key sectors such as tourism and transportation;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Parliament of Ontario consider an immediate gas price freeze for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate, and

"That the provincial government petition the federal Liberal government to step up to the plate and lower gas prices by removing the GST on gasoline products and fix the federal Competition Act to ensure consumers are protected and that the market operates in a fair and transparent manner."

I affix my name in full support.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have here a petition signed by a great many of the good residents of Oxford county, and it is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my signature to this petition, as I agree with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Petitions? The member for Durham.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm somewhat disappointed that the member from Waterloo wasn't recognized there.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas public transit is an important public good for Ontario which must be promoted;

"Whereas increased ridership of the public transit system will result in benefits such as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the ease of traffic congestion and gridlock;

"Whereas it is important to provide incentives to commuters to choose public transit as an alternative,

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: That eligible residents for the taxation year living within the province of Ontario be able to claim on their income tax an expense credit of 50% for all public transit expenses incurred throughout the taxation year."

This is part of Bill 137, and I'm pleased to endorse it on behalf of many constituents.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I have here 15,000 names.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the residents of Sarnia-Lambton and surrounding area:

"Were told a peer review would be done, including both financial and clinical aspects;

"Were told publicly on numerous times that front-line staff would not be affected;

"Were told that the quality of care because of these cuts would not be affected;

"Our community is already listed as having the highest shortage rate for physicians, and our community is now losing a neurologist, an obstetrician, two radiologists and possibly more medical professionals; and

"As a result of cutbacks, our palliative care unit is scheduled to close.

"As patients, doctors, nursing staff and residents, we have voiced concerns to the board, upper administration, Ministry of Health and to the Premier—our concerns have not been heard or dealt with adequately; we are asking for an investigation regarding the spending of dollars at Bluewater Health and for these matters to be reopened as patient lives will be more at risk because of these cuts."

I hereby affix my signature.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This is a petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

"Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

"Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients" in Ontario "with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

"Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new cancer drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the needs of patients."

I've attached my signature in support, and I'm going to give that to Adam to hand over to the Clerk.

1540

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I have a petition that is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas existing legislation enforcing mandatory retirement is discriminatory; and

"Whereas it is the basic human right of Ontario citizens over the age of 65 to earn a living and contribute to society; and

"Whereas the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have also abolished mandatory retirement in various forms; and

"Whereas ending mandatory retirement is a viable means of boosting the Ontario labour force and accommodating the growing need for skilled workers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Ontario government should act by abolishing mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario. This is best achieved by passing Bill 211, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code and certain other Acts to end mandatory retirement."

I'm in full agreement and I will affix my signature to it.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING STANDARDS

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas Bill 213, Justice Statute Law Amendment Act, 2002, enacted the Limitations Act, 2002, which provides for a reduction in the legal limitation period from six to two years;

"Whereas the two-year limitation period in effect from January 1, 2004, is not long enough for investors seeking restitution after suffering serious financial damages due to the wrongdoing of the financial services industry; and

"Whereas the Attorney General's position is that the plaintiff investor interests do not need further protection;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government immediately pass and implement an amendment to the Limitations Act, 2002, to provide an exemption for claim by victims of financial services industry wrongdoing so that no time limitation period applies to such claims."

I support and sign the petition.

QUEENSWAY CARLETON HOSPITAL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): The member from Nepean-Carleton.

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Might I say what a great job you're doing in your role, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

Mr. Baird: I'm trying to be non-partisan for a bit here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Queensway Carleton Hospital is one of the most efficient hospitals in the country;

"Whereas the Queensway Carleton Hospital's priority should be providing excellent patient care, not money for Paul Martin's Liberal government;

"Whereas the number of senior citizens served by the Queensway Carleton Hospital is growing rapidly in the west end of Ottawa and Nepean;

"Whereas the federal Liberal government led by Paul Martin has a surplus potentially as high as \$10 billion;

"Whereas all provincial political parties in Ontario have acknowledged the significant fiscal imbalance;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Ontario Legislature call upon the federal Liberal government to immediately cancel its plans to dramatically increase the rent for the land now being used by the Queensway Carleton Hospital, and that the hospital be charged only \$1 rent per year."

I'm very pleased to sign this petition because I am in complete agreement.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by a great number of my constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current government has eliminated OHIP coverage for chiropractic services; and

"Whereas the current government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for optometry services; and

"Whereas the current government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the current government has refused to fund treatment for autistic children even after the courts and human rights commission ruled it should; and

"Whereas the current government has now decided to fund sex change operations even though the Canada Health Act deems it not an essential health service;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations and reinstates funding for delisted health services."

I affix my signature to the petition.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): This petition is entitled, "Farmers Feed Cities' Day."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the 60,000 farmers in Ontario are the foundation for 10.3% of provincial economic activity; and

"Whereas many citizens do not appreciate the role Ontario farmers play in putting food on their table; and

"Whereas the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is only 0.7% of the Ontario budget, despite Dalton McGuinty's promise to make OMAF a 'lead ministry';

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Declare the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving Day as 'Farmers Feed Cities Day.'"

I see this is signed by John Tory, Richard Blyleven from my riding, and I also sign this petition.

ILLEGAL SIGNS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of the city of Vaughan. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the city of Vaughan has witnessed the proliferation of illegal signs across the municipality; and

"Whereas the city of Vaughan has received numerous complaints from residents concerning the proliferation of illegal signs across the municipality; and

"Whereas the city of Vaughan bylaw department continually wastes time, money and resources in an attempt to stop the proliferation of illegal signs; and

"Whereas the current city of Vaughan sign bylaw limits the extent to which the proliferation of illegal signs can be stopped by prohibiting charges being laid against the party whose name is contained in the sign; and

"Whereas the city of Vaughan is requesting that the province provide the city with more authority and autonomy to address local issues;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the city of Vaughan requests that the province consider strengthening the Municipal Act, RSO 1990, in order to allow municipi-

palities to charge and recoup costs for illegal signs and those names on the sign, rather than the current law, which only permits charges to be laid unless replacement is witnessed by a party thereto."

I'm pleased to sign this and endorse it on behalf of the municipality of Vaughan.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my name in full support.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I have a valid petition here that I'd like to present to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children with autism who have reached the age of six years are no longer being discharged from their preschool autism program; and

"Whereas these children should be getting the best special education possible in the form of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) within the school system; and

"Whereas there are approximately 700 preschool children with autism across Ontario who are required to wait indefinitely for placement in the program, and there are also countless school-age children that are not receiving the support they require in the school system; and

"Whereas this situation has a negative impact on the families, extended families and friends of all of these children; and

"Whereas, as stated on the Web site for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 'IBI can make a significant difference in the life of a child with autism. Its objective is to decrease the frequency of challenging behaviours, build social skills and promote language development';

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund the treatment of IBI for all

preschool children awaiting services. We also petition the Legislature of Ontario to fund an educational program in the form of ABA in the school system."

I'm pleased to sign this on behalf of the many families who are trembling under the crushing load of treating their child with autism.

OPPOSITION DAY

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I move that the Legislative Assembly call upon the government:

To recognize that Ontario's businesses, farmers and hard-working families are being pushed to the financial breaking point by higher electricity prices, higher fuel prices and increased taxes; and

To recognize that the McGuinty Liberal government has presided over 42,000 manufacturing job losses in the past year alone, causing serious financial hardship for families and communities province-wide; and

To recognize that the current government's fiscal and energy policies are placing increased financial pressure on large and small job-creating businesses, creating an uncertain investment climate; and

To keep its promise to "balance the budget, keep taxes down, manage prudently, and invest in higher productivity and better quality of life."

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Debate. The leader of the official opposition.

Mr. Tory: We in this party have been trying to raise these matters during question period without any success at all in terms of getting an ounce, a line or a word of compassion or recognition from this government. It isn't just in question period. As we pointed out today during question period, when they had an opportunity yesterday to present an economic statement to the people of Ontario, there wasn't a line in here, not a letter that addressed the fate that is being experienced by an awful lot of people across this province, namely, the loss of manufacturing jobs, the impact it's having on communities across the province and the crushing load that people are having to bear in terms of the increased taxes and charges they are experiencing at the hands of this McGuinty Liberal government.

Again, we would argue that ignoring the problem, kind of saying, "Don't worry. Be happy," not saying a word of empathy or compassion, not offering a single line of solution, is not going to make this problem go away, because the facts are the facts: 42,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this province so far this year. For five months this year, the unemployment rate in Ontario has been above the national average, for the first time since World War II, and the average family is paying, as we speak, \$2,000 each in increased taxes, costs and other fees imposed on the watch of this government.

It's communities across the province. We talked about a number of them today and we talked about a number of them last week. We have Guelph and Aylmer, where Imperial Tobacco has announced the termination of 635 jobs, and the local Liberal member, Ms. Sandals, said, "It will cause disruption in the lives of those that will be laid off, but it does prove that government legislation is working." Quite a statement indeed and, as far as we can tell, represents the policy and the views of the government, because not a word has been said to add to that, to take away from that or however the case may be, since those words were spoken just a few days ago.

In Windsor and St. Catharines, the Big Three auto companies have indicated they're going to be terminating 2,600 jobs across the province among auto workers. In Chesterville, Nestlé, which I believe has been in operation there since 1918, 300 jobs to be lost; Niagara Falls, ConAgra, 240 jobs to be lost; Sears, Toronto, 800 jobs to be lost; in Collingwood, Simcoe-Grey, 420 jobs announced to be at risk because of the energy crisis, concurred in, announced and implemented by this government; Backyard Products, 230 jobs lost; Blue Mountain Pottery, 37 jobs lost; Nacan Products, 87 jobs lost; Kaufman Furniture, 150 jobs lost.

What did we ask this government to do as a starter? The member for Simcoe-Grey and the local officials there asked if it would be possible that the Premier of this province, in light of these hundreds and hundreds of jobs in Simcoe-Grey and Collingwood, might agree to hold a round table. It wasn't to have a big, multi-million-dollar program. It wasn't to guarantee all the jobs would be saved. Could the Premier just spend a little bit of his time coming to have a discussion with the local people, the local member and some of the people up there about this? What we got back when I asked the Premier if he'd be willing to have that discussion was the usual old rehash of talking points from a briefing book that had nothing to do with the hardship and the heartache being faced by these people, these families and these communities losing those jobs.

It gets no better when it comes to the farmers of Ontario. We ask questions about the farmers and all we get back, again, is the same rehash from the briefing book. The farmers were in my office two days ago. The stuff that's in the briefing book they have clearly declared is not good enough, just like the forestry industry. It is not helping them. Most of it is not new and most of it is not happening. As a result, those people are saying, "It is not helping me, it is not helping my family," and it is not helping the communities in which those people live. I represent some of those communities, and the businesses in those towns are hurting because of the fact that this government has completely, absolutely and utterly turned its back, not only on the manufacturing economy, not only on Ontario families who are paying \$2,000 more each in McGuinty Liberal charges, taxes and fees, but also completely and absolutely on rural Ontario and on the farm economy in this province.

Ontario needs jobs. Jobs are the lifeblood of every single community in this province, especially a city as

big as Toronto, but also just as importantly the smallest town in Ontario. It is those jobs that allow new Canadians to pursue their dreams and opportunities when they come here. It is those jobs that allow parents to save for their children's education. It is those jobs that allow young Ontarians to build a life close to home. It's also those jobs that provide the money that this government spends so freely that is needed for health care, education and programs to help kids and families in some of the neighbourhoods that have had a tough problem with crime this year and before.

If you look at what would be produced by one percentage point more in growth—or, put another way, if you could stop some of those jobs from being lost in Ontario through the actions, policies and regulations of this government—just one percentage point more in growth would produce \$615 million in government revenues in the first year. That number grows as you go into the out year, so you would have that money available for purposes of health care and other services.

The 42,000 manufacturing jobs, about which we can't get a word of acknowledgement or interest out of this government, by themselves would, and do, produce approximately \$100 million in government revenues. So the government will lose that revenue when those people lose their jobs.

I think it's actually more important and more worthy of discussion that the people lose their jobs and end up without the dignity—the necessities and the support that they can provide to their families—of having a job. But it shouldn't be going without comment that the government loses \$100 million that is not available to finance health care, education and programs for kids and families, and so on.

Doug Porter, senior economist at BMO Nesbitt Burns: "I think we could start to see the impact really soon—as early as the fourth quarter of this year.... As the negatives keep stacking up for the province, we will see growth weaken ... and begin to dig into the province's revenues."

I'm not standing up and quoting this man because I hope that will happen or because I take pleasure in seeing it happen. I am standing up and talking about it because the people of Ontario want to have hope. They want to know there's an opportunity, and they want to know that the government is going to be there for them in their corner when their town is hard hit by a layoff, when their families are hard hit by a layoff, or when they are being crushed under the burden of taxes and charges they're having to pay to these McGuinty Liberals when they're getting 1.5% or 2% at work and finding the load imposed by this McGuinty Liberal government is so much higher.

If the revenues start to go down—to speak to the other point I was mentioning a moment ago—what happens next? Which promises get broken next? These people are up to 50 broken promises now. It's got to be a world record; it's absolutely got to be a world record. As the revenues of the government start to go down, as we lose jobs, what happens next? Which promise is the next to go? The consistent pattern of this government and Mr.

McGuinty, I would argue, is to break the promises, refuse responsibility or accountability for ever having made the promises, and then have no accountability and leave the taxpayer, quite frankly, holding the bill and without whatever it was they were promised they would have when it came time to vote in the last election.

The tax promise has been broken. The deficit and financial management promise has been broken. The police officer and nursing promises are so far from being kept that it's almost an impossibility that they will be kept. They're dragging them out to the last minute, if indeed they're kept at all. We've seen no real sense of accountability on the part of this government that indicates it wants to be held responsible for the actions of its own minister, including the most recent fiasco of the Minister of Finance of this province, the man in charge of economic policy, of empathy, of doing something, of managing the provincial finances. We see what he did when he was given the chance on the public trust, on the public money, to go over to Europe.

It's interesting: It's not really an option to conduct yourself this way when you're in private life. If you're an individual family, you don't have the option, when the bank calls to say your credit cards are maxed out, just to say, "Well, I'm going to appoint a committee to look into it and we'll get back to you in a year." You don't have the option if you're in business and you've got a problem, and your bank manager calls and says they're calling the loan, to say, "We're going to have a royal commission and we'll get back to you," and perhaps you could have a lawyer come down and make some submissions.

When businesses are losing money, they don't have the option of shaking down their shareholders for the money to solve the problem, and that's all these people know how to do: When there's a problem, shake the shareholders down; shake the citizens and taxpayers of Ontario down. They don't have anything more to be shaken up for. They don't have anything left. They're falling further behind, the harder they work.

1600

You need to be accountable. Only government—especially this government—can afford to ignore that principle.

We hear it over and over again: Taxpayers who are getting the 1% or 2% at work are facing electricity prices that are up close to double digits. Eye exams: They have to pay for them now; they didn't before. Chiropractic services: They have to completely pay for them now; they didn't before. The health tax: They have to pay that and were promised they wouldn't have to. Home heating costs are up, gasoline prices are up and so forth.

Take it from Gavin Graham, director of investments at Guardian Group, when he was talking this way about home heating: "This even before the real hit, which is going to be your heating bill, with a 60% increase estimated on the way for winter.... Unlike, 'No let's not go to Wal-Mart this week or let's not go for the drive in the country,' heating your house in February is not some-

thing about which you have a choice." The point he's making is that people are already saying, "Let's not go out to the restaurant," or "Let's not go to Wal-Mart," and that too is having its impact.

You saw in the minister's economic statement that all those indicators are down from the beginning of this year, when we saw the budget. They're saying that they're expecting less activity in the economy than we were going to see before. With the heating prices coming on, the gas prices still being as they are, the hydro prices, the health tax, the eye examinations, the chiropractic examinations, the property taxes and everything else directly attributable to the policies of this government, people can't take any more. They're paying \$2,000 more in taxes and charges courtesy of Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party.

Consumer confidence: down seven points in August and another six in September. Only these guys, only this Minister of Finance and this Premier, would have the gall to stand up and say, "That's got to be an indication that things are really going well. Boy, the results are great. Things are just super for the people," and consumer confidence is down 15 points in two months.

Charles Feaver, vice-president of research at Investors Group: "More consumers say they are worse off now than a year ago—a logical consequence of rising oil and gasoline prices."

Retail trade: down 1.2% last quarter.

Gavin Graham, again: "If it's a major purchase such as a car, or should you buy that house or that consumer durable, or maybe even, should we go out for a meal—at the least maybe you will trade down, maybe eat more cheaply—not do that additional spending."

We don't hope that happens, but if these people don't do something soon to help these taxpayers who are too hard pressed and to help these people who are losing their jobs and these communities that are affected by the loss of those jobs, that is what is going to happen. I'm not hoping it's going to be so; I am predicting it will be so if they don't take some action and indicate some caring and some empathy about this.

It is time for action. The last thing this Minister of Finance and this Premier should have been standing up and doing in this House when they did the last couple of days—the Premier the day before and Mr. Duncan yesterday—was to get up to boast and brag, and not demonstrate a word of caring or concern about what's going on in this province and how hard pressed these taxpayers are and how hard hit these communities are.

People need someone to speak up for them. They think and hope that their government is going to do that. In the case of this McGuinty Liberal government, especially Premier McGuinty, the biggest buck passer of all times, and especially Mr. Duncan, the biggest boaster of all times, when it comes to coming in here and talking about the economy, they're being let down. They can't hire a lobbyist. They don't have time, when they're unemployed or working so hard at two jobs to try and keep up, to come down here and demonstrate. They expect their gov-

ernment, especially a majority government sitting over there with all the power in the world to do whatever they want, to speak up for them, and it's not happening.

Those families are falling further and further behind and they need our help. They need the help and the attention of Mr. McGuinty, Mr. Duncan and this government, who have absolutely failed to step forward to help them at all.

I would only say to you that we are there for them. That is why we have moved this motion, that is why I am proud to move this motion and to have this discussion in this House today about these people and the challenges they face, because no one on the government side of the House, I say with respect and with regret, is speaking up for them. We are going to do it; we're going to continue to do it. This will not be the last day; it will be the first day of many more.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It certainly is my privilege to rise today to speak to the motion that has been put forward by the official opposition. One of the things I'd like to start with is what the leader of the official opposition started with, that he has no success at question period. You would have to ask yourself, why is he not having success at question period? Could it be that the questions aren't relevant? Could it be the style in which one asks the questions? It could be all of those things. So one has to wonder, when one puts a motion forward, when we are here to speak about what this means to the people of Ontario, why the member who brought that forward then talks about why he doesn't have success at question period. I do just want to add that.

Then we go on to say that part of the conversation that happened was how the McGuinty government has turned their back on rural Ontario. I must say that I'm very pleased that the member has found out where rural Ontario is. I'm so pleased and so happy that he has found us. I'm sure that he didn't even know where we were. But we know where we are, and we know what you've done in the past, what the Harris-Eves government did to rural communities. For a member of that previous government to stand up and talk about what we have done for our rural communities—I'm absolutely taken aback. You ripped the heart out of our rural communities. You did not take into consideration at any time the difference between urban and rural. So when I see him come forward and say that he's found rural communities, we're absolutely delighted to be found, but we know where we are. We know that we have a part in the McGuinty government, that the McGuinty government has come to the table, and we recognize the respect for our communities that he brings to the table.

One of the things that I want to talk about is energy costs. It would behoove me to bring forward what has happened in the past. Between 1995 and 2003, the energy capacity under the previous government—and you'll find these numbers fascinating—fell by 6%; the demand grew by 8.5%. You talk about the shareholders, who are the

people of Ontario. The energy flip-flop that happened with Ernie Eves—

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Flip-flop.

Mrs. Mitchell: Yes. Then, when he kept changing his mind when deregulation was imposed—he pulled back and a cap was put in place—that cost Ontario taxpayers \$1 billion. So when we talk about what's appropriate behaviour for the shareholders of the province of Ontario, it certainly strikes me as passing strange that that member would bring it forward. Ernie Eves flip-flopped 11 times on selling Hydro One. That's got to be a record. We talk about complete mismanagement. I have said it; it's here. That is on the record.

One of the things that I do want to talk about is what we have done with energy. As many of the members know, I come from the riding of Huron–Bruce. Our government has made a tremendous difference in the riding of Huron–Bruce: 1,500 jobs in my riding. Do you know what this means to my riding? We have been besieged by BSE, low commodity prices—1,500 jobs in construction; 1,000 new permanent jobs. I can tell you that our riding believes the McGuinty government has made a commitment to the industry and is filling the gap in the capacity that is required.

But it's also about the turbines. When the cap was placed by the previous government, you would laud yourselves as being the great representatives of rural communities. We'll get on to what happened with agriculture. But I just want to talk about what happened amongst the agricultural community when that cap was imposed. That stopped the renewables from moving forward. The agricultural community was ready. They were excited. They saw themselves being a part of the energy capacity providers in the province of Ontario. When that cap was imposed, that door was slammed shut.

1610

We move forward, and have made over \$1 million in commitment to anaerobic digestion with Lynn Cattle, and the wind turbines are going up. We in rural Ontario support these initiatives. We know how important they are. We talk about when you need to diversify your income. The agricultural community sees this as a way of strengthening our rural community. So it was what we felt was a very regressive move. And then, for it to have cost us \$1 billion, not only was it regressive but a \$1-billion price tag—probably to the member, the leader of the official opposition, with \$1 billion now we are starting to talk about real change, but where I come from, \$1 billion is something the people from my riding won't see. They understand the value of a dollar. They understand how hard you have to work to make a dollar and save a dollar.

I know it's difficult, when you only talk about shareholders, to understand that, but we talk about an additional \$400 million added to protect manufacturing, 77,000 new net jobs, the unemployment rate at 6.4% in June—that is the lowest since 2001—and retail sales up 4.8%. We're ahead of last year. Ontario car sales jumped 10.2%. Ontario businesses plan to increase spending on

machinery and equipment. That's what working families are talking about. They're talking about what we're providing. We're investing in the people of Ontario. We understand that. We talk about, what do the people of Ontario want? They want better health care. They want better education. The future is in our young people. Clearly that is what we have heard. We are investing in the people of Ontario.

With the McGuinty government, we know the strength is with the Ontario people. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition doesn't seem to clearly understand that we know it's there. They're waiting for us to come forward. We look forward to moving this province forward. We have the plan in place. We're ready, and we will move forward.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): It's disappointing that over the past two years we've had a tremendous opportunity in this province, and this opportunity has been lost. In the last two years we've had strong growth left over from the growth our government created in this province when we produced a million new jobs. For that future, we could have built toward a stronger future, but this government didn't do that. In fact, they did exactly the opposite: They increased taxes—they increased taxes on small business; they increased taxes on large business.

When you take away dollars from a business, large or small, it reduces their ability to reinvest in their plant, and that's exactly what happened. Last month we saw Canada drop from number three in productivity as measured by the OECD. In 2003 we were number three in the world; today, in 2005, we are number 12 in the world after two years of this government, on their watch. These are national figures: Ontario has about half of manufacturing jobs. That tax hike they brought in in their first budget in the spring of 2004 set in motion the downward spiral and resulted in 42,000 lost manufacturing jobs.

Now you have this unexpected surplus of revenue that appeared this fall. If your plan for Ontario was any good, your estimates for revenue would be much stronger and much better. In fact, if you had accurate estimates of what your revenue might be, as it turned out, you may not have needed that tax increase you put through. You wouldn't have had to kill off 42,000 jobs in Ontario. Ontario would be in better financial shape to withstand the coming economic downturn if you hadn't introduced those huge, massive tax increases that killed jobs in this province. Your government would have had even more revenue to pay for the important services of health care and of education in Ontario. You may even have been able to implement the 1,000 new police officers that you promised in this province—we haven't seen one police officer yet. And you may have been able to implement source water protection in the environment. Yes, probably you could even have bought more napkins, done more planning and had better plans and more of them if you hadn't introduced that massive tax.

But because you had no plan, or at least you had one that you hadn't thought through, we now stand on the

edge. Your flexibility has disappeared at the worst time. Interest rates are rising, housing starts are down and auto sales in the United States hit a seven-month low. As the new models are being introduced, they should be growing, not receding.

As we enter an economic downturn, the idea is to be the last in and the first out. Our opportunity to achieve this goal, being the last in and the first out, was squandered by two years of wandering by this government, going through two, three, four different economic plans; none of them thought through, none of them planned very well. The result is a litany of plant closures, 42,000 lost manufacturing jobs and disaster and dislocation to many Ontario families.

Your member from Guelph thinks your plan is working. Well, I can tell you, I don't think it's working. Many Ontarians would not agree with her. It's time for a napkin, time for a new plan; soon it will be time for a new government.

Mr. Bisson: I'm so glad to participate in this motion today because it gives me a chance to raise an issue that is important not only to the people of Timmins–James Bay but to people across this province, and that is what's happening in the forestry sector. Mr. Speaker, you've heard not only myself but my colleague Howard Hampton and others in this Legislature raise this issue time and time again, and we're going to keep on raising it until the government figures out that they have a problem on their hands that they've got to deal with.

Just yesterday, the Ontario Forest Industries Association, along with the municipalities of northwestern Ontario, came to visit us here at Queen's Park. As far as I know, they met all of the three caucuses. I know they meet with us, I know they met with the Conservatives; I have to believe they met with the Liberals. They were very clear. They said, "We have a made-in-Ontario problem." The forestry industry in Ontario, when it comes to being competitive with other jurisdictions, is having a really big problem. Why? Fibre costs, as far as transporting fibre into the mills, are much more expensive in Ontario than anywhere else—as a result of government policy, as they put it.

The big kicker is electricity prices. They were pointing out, for example, that a paper mill operating in Kenora or Kapuskasing will operate at an electricity cost of about \$2.2 million to \$2.5 million per month. That is what they pay in electricity. If you operate that same mill in Manitoba, it's \$800,000 to \$900,000. They're saying they just can't afford those kinds of high costs in this province to be able to operate and stay in business and do what they need to do to remain competitive within the world market for paper and other products.

They have come to Queen's Park to be very clear. They want the government to move on a number of key issues. They say, "You can throw money at this, and it ain't going to fix the problem." Yes, last September the government announced a package and that package said, "If you want to go out and borrow money, the province of Ontario will guarantee your loan and will help you

secure financing to do whatever it is you need to do in your plant." Well, the problem with that is the following: These mills don't need that investment at this point, quite frankly. The message is that these are the most competitive, the most modern mills in North America. Go into Kapuskasing, Red Rock, Kenora and Thunder Bay, walk into all of these mills—either saw mills, paper mills or kraft mills—and you will find that the technology in Ontario is second to none. So they're saying, "Listen, we don't need government to tell us to invest in our mills. We don't need government to help us invest in our mills. That's not the issue. We understand that we have to be competitive. The way you do that is by being up on technology and making sure you use the latest technologies to be as efficient as possible when it comes to running your mill." They're saying, "Thanks a lot for the package you announced in September, much appreciated, but it won't do a heck of beans, because that's not our problem. What we need you to do is to deal with electricity prices."

1620

Now, they asked us the question in the meeting we were at yesterday: "Why is it that the government won't come off of the position they've taken on electricity?" I think, quite simply, the government have put themselves in a box, and they don't know how to get out of it. It's as simple as that.

The government didn't have, in opposition, a plan when it came to electricity. They basically criticized the Conservatives for having moved toward privatization and deregulation. They stood in the opposition benches, along with New Democrats, in condemning the Conservative government for having moved in that direction, and then basically got elected, realized they didn't have a plan, didn't know how to deal with the issue, so adopted the Conservative plan of hydro privatization and deregulation.

They've put themselves in a box. So where do they go from there? Do they all of a sudden admit that they were wrong and try to undo the box? Trying to undo the box would be difficult. I'm the first one to admit it.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Well, that's exactly where I'm going. Because the government won't admit they're wrong, they're going to end up basically putting down the forestry industry to the point that we figure about 12 to 15 mills will probably go down in northern Ontario.

So I say to the government—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: I'm going to take half of the time.

Interjection: Half?

Mr. Bisson: Yes, half of our time.

Very good. I always want to be helpful to my friends in the Conservative caucus in letting them know how much time I will be taking.

I want to say to the government, you need to get out of the box you've created for yourself on electricity prices. If you get out of that box, you have a chance, and there are a couple of things that we suggest you're able to do that would help you deal with your electricity costs.

One of those things, for example, is that if you take a look—and Howard Hampton has pointed this out a number of times, and many people in the industry are agreeing with him and saying, “Why is it you can operate a pulp and paper mill somewhere in northern Ontario that’s maybe five, 10, 15 or 20 miles from a power generation facility on a river, and it costs about four cents or 4.5 cents per kilowatt to generate the power, and we’re having to pay as much as 11 cents?” They’re saying, “Why don’t we have a policy where we make that electricity available to that industry in recognition of the fact that they are the industry that uses the most electricity, other than smelters and the mining industry, and have a system of electricity that is based on the reality of Ontario, basically recognizing that?”

Now, the government will argue—and I’ve watched this argument, where they say, “Oh, well, we have a pool price of electricity in Ontario, and we can’t move off the pool price issue.” For those people who are wondering what that means, “pool price” means to say what you pay in Kenora is what you pay in Cornwall. Well, that isn’t the case, and I think people need to recognize there is a two-tier system of electricity pricing, depending on where you are.

I’ll give you an example: If this apartment building or office high-rise in the city of Toronto clicks on all of the air conditioners in the summer or cranks up the electric heat in the winter, and all the windows are left open, they’re going to pay virtually the same price for electricity no matter how much they utilize because of the amount of electricity they use in comparison to other places. But if a paper mill in northern Ontario that runs a thermal mechanical pulping system uses electricity in the way that they do, they don’t just pay for base-load power price at 11.5 cents per kilowatt hour. They pay for demand peak-load price based on what the demand is in other places.

So here’s the scenario: It’s a hot, humid, muggy day in downtown Toronto. Everybody turns on their air conditioner. Electricity load is basically drawn from the power lines from our hydroelectric plants, our cogeneration stations, our coal-fired plants and our nuclear stations, and that electricity is being drawn in to where people have their air conditioners on. What happens is that in northern Ontario, for mining and people in the forestry sector, they end up having to pay what’s called peak-load price.

For example, two weeks ago in Kapuskasing, they were paying \$2,000 per megawatt hour to operate their mill. They can’t operate at that price, so they shut it down and waited until the electricity price went back down again. So we don’t have a pool price.

I can draw as much electricity as I want in the city of Toronto in a high-rise and pay the base-load price, but if I operate a paper mill in Kapuskasing, Ontario, or in Red Rock, and all of a sudden there’s a huge demand for electricity in southern Ontario, I’ve got to pay for what is called peak-load price when it comes to purchasing hydro.

There is no pool price for electricity, so why not have a policy that says, “Let’s recognize that not all hydro utility customers are the same”? You have the residential sector, you have the business sector and you have other sectors like forestry and mining that use large amounts of electricity, not because they waste the power but because the process they’re involved in utilizes a heavy amount of electricity. We need to recognize that there needs to be a special price for that particular industry.

That’s something you see in the private sector. I’ll give you a good example: Wal-Mart says, “Listen, I’m going to buy a million of your products to be sold in my stores across North America.” They get a better price than if I buy five of them and try to sell them out of my mom-and-pop store in downtown Timmins. That principle is recognized everywhere else: Those who use the most get a better price based on how much they use. There’s an opportunity for this government to take a look at that as one possible solution.

The other one is that you need to move off of this concept that we need to privatize and deregulate the electricity sector. It hasn’t worked anywhere else: Why are we doing that in Ontario? We’re driving a death nail into a number of industries, specifically in the north, but at the end of the day it will affect all of this province.

I want to repeat what Jamie Lim said, who is the president of the Ontario Forest Industries Association, words that need to be listened to. Think about it. “If one of these companies goes down, the purchasing power they have in supplying their material needs, their technical needs, the financial needs of those companies are services that are taken, by and large, from southern Ontario. We’ve looked at some of the figures in one company’s case alone. If they were to shut down, \$250 million worth of purchasing would disappear from the city of Toronto.” That’s a lot of money; that’s a lot of jobs. It’s not just about a mill in Kapuskasing, Red Rock or Kenora; it’s about the entire economy of northern Ontario, and Ontario in general. The forestry sector is the second-largest industry in Ontario. Imagine if we had this problem in the auto sector: We’d be running in spades to try to figure out a solution. It’s beyond me why both the federal and provincial governments don’t respond to the degree that they need to in order to fix this problem.

That brings me to another issue that the OFIA has raised, which is a good idea that I hope will not fall on deaf ears with the federal government. I do know that the OFIA, the Ontario Forest Industries Association, met with the NDP caucus federally, with Jack Layton and my colleague Charlie Angus. I believe it was last night. What they were talking to them about, and will be talking to the government members about as well, is this concept of putting together a loan program. It would be like a pool of dollars that industry is able to draw on when they’re exporting lumber into the United States, because we all know that Canada has won the appeal on NAFTA when it comes to the CSV. But still the Americans refuse to relent in charging the 24% tax when our exports, their imports, go into the American market. The industry is

saying, "Have the federal government set up a fund. Those who are cash-strapped and need to do this would be able to recoup the 24% or 22%, depending on your case, from this federal fund, and they would continue to operate."

It would send a very strong message to the Americans: "You can do what the heck you want. At the end of the day, we will stand squarely behind our industry." What it will do at one point is to force the Americans to settle with the Canadian government, and when the Canadians recover the money that the Americans have taken that is rightfully ours, the Canadian government can repay itself. It is a way that we're able to assist the industry by making available to them the dollars they are losing on CSV, and being in a position to stabilize the industry so that they can start breathing again and do what they need to do to operate their plants wherever they might be in Ontario. It is not strictly northern Ontario, as you know; we have a number of plants in the south as well. I say to our friends in the Liberal caucus on the provincial side that you should be talking to your federal colleagues and looking at the whole issue of trying to get some support from the federal Liberal caucus in Ottawa to respond to this.

I can tell you that federal New Democrats Jack Layton, Charlie Angus and others have supported this initiative, and it's something that we support on the provincial side. I think all three parties support the idea, and we should do what we can in order to get the feds to recover.

1630

I also want to talk about the economy from the perspective of the First Nations communities of James Bay, NAN, Treaty 3 and others. One of the things we really need to turn our attention to is finding a way to engage the province and the federal government in working in partnership with our First Nations brothers and sisters so that they're able to participate in the economy of Ontario. The crisis that we see in Kashechewan today: I think we can all recognize that the social infrastructure lacking in those communities, basically caused by the lack of economic opportunity, is part of the problem.

What we need to do is to engage ourselves in thinking outside of the box, so that we can find ways of being able to assist First Nations to develop their own economies. There are some quite simple ways of doing that right now. For example, all of us have heard about the community of Attawapiskat. Attawapiskat will be the host community of the first diamond mine in Ontario history. De Beers are going to be spending \$1 billion over the next couple of years to develop this diamond mine.

Let me tell you—I'm out of the mining industry—nobody spends \$1 billion unless they know there's more than \$1 billion to be gotten out of the ground, so we know this is a rich deposit. It will probably outlive just De Beers. I would imagine that there are diamond pipes in the area that are as good as what they found in the De Beers Victor Project.

What we need to do is not do what federal and provincial governments have done up to now, which is to

basically say to First Nations, "Go and negotiate for yourselves a benefit impact agreement with De Beers." What we need to do is engage ourselves in working with De Beers and the First Nations and say what role the federal and provincial governments can play to assist the First Nations communities to benefit from these projects.

For example, in the community of Attawapiskat they're going to need electricians at that mine. They're going to need mechanics, millwrights, miners, all kinds of skilled tradespeople, technologists etc. to construct and run that mine. Part of the problem, if you look across James Bay within our particular communities, is that there isn't the kind of capacity when it comes to people able to do those jobs to the degree that we need. Sure, we have some electricians, some mechanics, but by and large we don't have enough to supply the needs of that mine.

We've known this mine is coming for a while. We know it's going to be in production in about three or four years. Why don't we as a province, the one that's responsible for training, partner with De Beers in Attawapiskat and say, "We will work with you to develop training specific to First Nations to assist in giving people the opportunity to do what needs to be done to get ready for whatever training is needed to do that job"?

Some of that is happening individually through organizations like Northern College. Northern College has a program where they're doing pre-apprenticeship training for people who want to go into the electrical trade. Why do I know that? My own brother-in-law, George Beauchamp, is actually teaching that particular program, and I've gone in to speak to his class. These are First Nations people from the Fort Albany-Kashechewan-Attawapiskat area who are interested in becoming electrical apprentices so that when the mine starts up, they will have what is necessary as the basis to be hired as apprentices, get jobs inside that company and eventually become journeyman electricians.

We could follow on the lead of Northern College and not say, "Northern College, you're on your own." Thank God for Michael Hill and his staff at Northern College, who are doing this and are proactive in our northern communities. They're really demonstrating what a community college is all about. But we need the support of our provincial government to say that we have a provincial strategy to assist our colleges—Collège Boréal, Northern College, l'Université de Hearst, Laurentian University or Canadore—to do what needs to be done to put in place the mechanisms and training programs to help qualify people for the types of jobs they are going to need when that mine runs in three years.

If we don't do that, here's what is going to happen. There's going to be a mine opening three years from now, and you're going to see an ad in the papers across Ontario, saying, "Needed: 25 electricians. Apply: Victor Project, Attawapiskat, Ontario." And 25 people from somewhere outside Attawapiskat will work as electricians on that project. What does that do for the community of Attawapiskat? It doesn't lower their unemployment rate; it doesn't give people dollars in their pockets so that

they then can have that money circulate inside their local economies. It does nothing. So we need to be proactive as a provincial government in assisting that to happen.

Other things that we need to do: We need to put in place resource management protocols in northern Ontario so that when we go on to traditional lands north of 51 and in other places, there are clear rules about what has to be done on the part of those who are proponents of exploration or development of new projects and whatever it might be—forestry, mining; you name it—so that there are protocols about what you are supposed to do as the entrepreneur and what your obligations are toward the First Nation when it comes to helping develop that project. I think that's something the province can do that would be very beneficial and would outlast all of us in this Legislature as a legacy to the First Nations, so that 25 years from now we end up—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Really? I didn't expect you to say that. I have a little note from my friend, saying, "Take as much time as you need." I would say, "You know me: I'll take it all." I better not do that.

We would be able to have a legacy 25 years from now so that people would be able to say that back in 2005 the Ontario Legislature put in place resource management protocols that have led to employment in those communities. I guarantee you that 25 years from now, if you go into those communities, you won't see the Kashechewan of today. I know my good friend Dave Levac, who represents the area of the Six Nations in the Brantford area, understands exactly what I am talking about. I need to say to my friends that we need to find a way to challenge ourselves as to how we're able to develop a local economy.

In the last couple of minutes, because I want to leave some time for my good friend Andrea Horwath, who will say something on this, there is a last point I want to make. We were at the estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture not long ago. I said to the ministry, "Why don't we, as a pilot project, look at doing something to assist a community that is interested in growing their own vegetables, and maybe having some dairy cattle in those communities so they can sustain themselves?"

Let me explain. If you're in Fort Albany and go to the Northern Store to buy a quart of milk, be prepared to pay three times the price you pay in downtown Timmins or Toronto. How does a family who's trying to live on welfare afford to give their children the milk they need to grow up strong and healthy? It's pretty hard to do. People are having to make choices: Buy food or pay the rent. When you don't pay the rent, the community doesn't have money to keep the housing stock in order. When you've got that, you have a housing situation that becomes deplorable.

One of the things we could do is an idea that was raised to me by one of the public health nurses in Fort Albany at the Peetabeck Health Centre, who said, "I would really like to have some assistance to start up a pilot project, so that we're able to develop a community

garden where we can look in the community for those people who are interested in being able to do what needs to be done to prepare a plot of land, and possibly have to build some sort of fundamental greenhouse so we can extend the season a little bit, where we can grow our own potatoes, beets, carrots, lettuce, whatever it is that might be done so that we can supplement our diet over the years so that we can have fresh vegetables when it comes to feeding our own people."

Why not look at the issue of how agriculture can play a more important role in those communities so that they can become more self-sufficient? We know they are hunter-gatherers, the Mushkegowuk Cree people. We need to find ways to complement what they've done traditionally, maybe in a non-traditional way, so that they are able to become much more sustaining when it comes to a community.

I say to my friends the Conservatives, I support the motion they bring forward. I think this government could be doing a lot more when it comes to economic development. I very much look forward to the comments of my friend Andrea Horwath, the member from Hamilton East.

1640

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I am more than happy to join in the debate today on the opposition day motion. I'm not surprised by that motion. I think they've been very clear on the record about what they feel.

The first thing I want to talk about—especially since this is Advocis Day and we have a lot of people around this place who know something about math—is that there seems to be in the premise of the opposition day motion that there have been 42,000 manufacturing jobs lost. I know that since we took office, there have been 193,000 net new jobs. What that means, of course, is that over time new jobs are created, and over time some jobs are lost. It is the natural place of the marketplace, the marketplace the Leader of the Opposition comes from, I might add. What we find is that what is important for people overall, for the province, is the number of total new jobs minus jobs lost, increasing or decreasing. I'm very proud of the fact that 193,000 net new jobs have been created in Ontario.

I want to put on the record—I've been very clear in my entire political career—that it is not the government of Ontario that created the jobs. We didn't add 193,000 more people to the public service. It was to hard-working business people right across this province, entrepreneurs, particularly small business, that the credit should be given. It's important, though, for the government itself to provide the framework that allows the economy to grow.

Specifically, what I want to talk about is the situation on the farms. I represent, as I've said many times, the most productive agricultural riding in the entire country. That is a fact. Sometimes the member from Huron–Bruce disagrees with me, because hers is also a very productive riding, as is Oxford, for example. We really live in the breadbasket, the heartland of this great province. But what I find interesting is that there seems to be this old

kind of Common Sense Revolution idea that one can, at the same time, cut taxes, improve services and balance the budget.

We found in the last three years that there was a total mismatch between the rise in revenue and the rise of expenses in the previous government. That left us with a structural deficit, a deficit that was not revealed in the Magna budget. I think the reason it wasn't in this Legislature, the reason there was disrespect shown to the great constitutional and democratic tradition of this place going back, really, to the Magna Carta, was so that we would bypass the ability of the opposition to do that. I know it's why this government has said that will never happen again, and we've taken steps to make sure that hasn't happened and can never happen again. But faced with that, we had to deal with the reality as it was received.

The Premier said many times that you oppose in poetry and you govern in prose, and we had to govern in prose; we had to take steps. We had to make sure that the government itself would get back to the position where we all agree it should be: with the ability to live within its means. That is a challenge; it always is for any government of any stripe. I think what we're finding is the progress that needs to be made so that the investments in health care, in education, in the economy, particularly in the automotive sector, in pharmaceutical and in agriculture are there.

There is a great sense across the land, I find, in rural Ontario where farm leaders themselves have realized that together, united, they present a stronger, more powerful voice to us here at Queen's Park, and strengthen the position of rural members who represent them as we argue on their behalf for their issues, just like my colleagues from the north do, just like my colleagues from the GTA do. But it is incumbent—and it's the theme I have had since I have been elected. How do we harness the great common sense of rural Ontario, the great love of the land, and transfer that into deliverables right here at Queen's Park? That united front, that united voice, I think, is working its way to actually having a sustainable, long-term solution that will address the crisis of farm income, not as some mere Band-Aid, but in a long-term sustainable way.

I know the Premier himself has a commitment to this that is unparalleled. The farm leaders have told me that the Premier's agri-food summit is something they agree with. Farmers have told me that the personal commitment of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, a member of the priority and planning committee of cabinet, a commitment backed up by her rural caucus who are echoing the strong voice of rural Ontario, is coming together like it never has before; it allows us to be in that position.

This government would be impotent to listen to the voice of agriculture, and respond to it, if we were being so rash as to say, as we struggle to get out of deficit, that somehow we have a plan to cut taxes but that we're going to be there for the farmers. I know the good people in Stratford want their hospital. I know the people in Listowel want that hospital. That money is coming from

the taxpayers. They want their services, and that's why it's so important.

I can assure you that, given this, I will be voting against the motion.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's my pleasure to add my vote of support and voice of support to our leader's opposition motion today.

One of the things that will concern business the most, if they want to ensure that they will be successful, is to make sure that they have a plan in place, that they have a goal and can evaluate themselves against that goal as they move forward. This is one of the serious problems that Ontario is facing today with regard to the energy policies of this government and how they have whacked this economy. You see, they have no plan.

I'm sure many people in this House and a lot of people out there in TV land have come up with the idea that they are going to do some repairs to their bathroom, for example, in their home. They start to do a little ripping and tearing, and do you know what happens? All of a sudden they come across all of this stuff they didn't expect. It's like a dog's breakfast. First, they lift up the toilet and the floor is rotten. So they go into the pipes and all of the pipes are corroded. The next thing you know, a small job in the bathroom becomes a real mess.

That's what's happened with this government's energy policy. They had no plan and no idea how they were going to get there. All they wanted to do was make this promise that they were going to eliminate 20% to 25% of the generation capacity in this province. What did they do? One of the things they did was put out this RFP process. Eastern Power, St. Clair Power—they awarded them contracts and deals, and they're having to backtrack on all of these because they had no plan in place. None of the situations that they expected would be there are in place. So what do we do? It's a disjointed policy. Now they have to go back and start the processes over, and this is costing time and money.

If you're a business and you have to have confidence in what's happening in the province of Ontario, how confident would you be if the government of the day could not tell you from one day to the next what their energy policy was and whether or not an announcement made is a commitment? Every day, you turn around and they've got something new. There is no confidence. Confidence in the economy of this province is dropping rapidly and is at staggeringly low levels, and the energy policy of this government is one of the prime components of that lack of confidence.

I think if I have to encapsulate this in a very short period of time, I could describe the energy policy of this government as Dalton's, Dwight's and Donna's desperate dance—a deplorably dangerous debacle.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Although I have an affinity for that kind of alliteration, I certainly don't have that kind of skill, but it was quite amusing to hear that.

I have to say that my colleague Gilles Bisson, the member for Timmins–James Bay, spent most of his time

talking about the issue that he has been working on very diligently with our leader, Howard Hampton, and that is the issue of the forestry sector and the way this government has failed the forestry sector, particularly in their energy policy.

As Gilles mentioned, yesterday we did meet with a number of people from the north, from the forestry sector, some of the mayors, and they were clear in their criticism of the government. They were clear in their fear that we will lose this sector completely from our economy if immediate action is not taken by the government. I thought it was important to get that said in a very clear and concise way, because I'm not going to spend much more time on that issue. But if they were that clear with us in our caucus discussion with them yesterday, then I suspect they were as clear with the Conservative caucus and with the Liberal caucus. It is now in the court of the government to fix this problem and to address the real likelihood that if they don't fix the problem, we will lose the entire forestry sector.

In talking about this over the last while, it's become clear that forestry sector concerns are not isolated to the north. We have all heard people in this House drawing the lines, the relationship between industry in the south and how it serves or provides products and services to the northern forestry sector, and how there are some manufacturers and plants in southern Ontario that will be directly affected by the growing crisis in the forestry sector. The figure, I think, if I'm not mistaken, ranges around the \$250-million mark in terms of the value of that southern Ontario economic impact. It is unthinkable that this government would be inactive in trying to address the crisis that is—it's not looming; it's upon us. It's happening. It's underway right now in northern Ontario.

1650

I spoke to one of the leaders of industry in my community at a recent function that took place in Hamilton. One of the things he was telling me was that the hydro issue is like the front car of the train, but the train is going off the track and there's a huge wreck ahead of us in terms of the economy, mostly because, almost entirely because, of this government's refusal to back away from its current direction on the hydro file. This very well respected, top leader in Hamilton alone, but also worldwide in his industry, is worried. He's worried about the government's lack of response to his concerns and the concerns of his industry on the hydro issues. What he said to me was quite plain: "It's hydro now. They are the front car in this train wreck, but every car behind it is going off on the same track. It's hitting the forestry sector first; next is the chemical sector. Equally being hit is the steel sector, and all of the other manufacturing sectors are going to be in a crisis fairly soon if this government does not change its ways." That's a pretty condemning description from a leader of industry in regard to the government's energy policies.

I have to bring to mind some of the questions that I've asked in this House around our economy, but particularly

around the steel sector, because of course I'm from Hamilton East and steel is a big part of Hamilton's current economy. It has been a part of Hamilton's economy since Hamilton was on the map. In fact, for many years the Hamilton steel industry fuelled the entire nation's economy. So it's an extremely important piece of our local economy. And of course steel jobs are well-paying jobs. So that industry has in many ways been the backbone of the city of Hamilton.

I've mentioned in this House a couple of times the crisis being faced by one particular manufacturer called Hamilton Specialty Bar. Hamilton Specialty Bar was a company, and is still a company, that is facing significant challenges in terms of hydro prices. What that has meant for them—and it's interesting, because it first came to my attention from people who work there, from some of the workers, who called my office and said, "I think there's something happening with our company." I said, "What do you mean?" The fellow said, "Well, through the history of this company, we have often gone through these little shutdowns from time to time; not big shutdowns, but if the energy prices spike too high, we just shut down for a couple of hours. Everybody is asked to go home. Then the next day, we come back in and continue on with production." But as a worker on the shop floor, he was sensing—and was actually being stuck with the results—that the number of times the shutdowns were occurring seemed to be more frequent and more lengthy.

As a result of some of the questions I asked in this House, I did receive some further information from the company, which I must say was extremely pleased by the fact that I did raise this issue in the House. Not unlike one of the other captains of industry, if you want to call them that, I was talking about earlier, he also indicated to me that he had a sense that the government simply was not listening to the voices of industry that were calling out for some help and calling out for some acknowledgement and some action on the hydro file.

In fact, this company was forced to stop production for a full 24 hours, which had never happened or had happened very rarely. In the past six months, and this was as of October 20, the furnace had been off for 214 hours, which was a 500% increase over 2002 and 2003. That is not only lost production time for the company in a very competitive industry, the steel industry, but also lost time and lost wages for the workers.

So I think those two examples really clearly indicate that there is a crisis in the hydro situation, that the government doesn't have a handle on that file and is not hearing the concerns that our industrial and forestry sectors are sending. They just don't hear the message.

But do you know what? It's not just about that. I think sometimes about the workers who are losing their jobs in that sector. I mean, it's nice for the government to get up and make all these claims, but what we do know is that we lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs, and I go back to the point I made earlier. Those manufacturing jobs are often very well paid jobs, with decent benefits, with an opportunity for people to actually raise families and have a

decent standard of living in today's economy. Those are the kinds of jobs that we're losing. Those are the kinds of jobs that the Liberals are chasing away. That's simply not acceptable. Those are the kinds of jobs that we should be protecting dearly. Those are the kinds of jobs that we should be making sure we are maintaining and growing in our economy, not simply allowing them to walk away to other parts of the world. It is an unacceptable loss for community after community when any one of those manufacturing plants closes and any one of those tens of thousands of workers is then without work.

What happens then? What happens after those people lose their jobs? Well, I can tell you what happens. Then they're faced with all kinds of bills and all kinds of cost-of-living increases that have been foisted upon them by their government, by this very government. So now they've lost their job because the government didn't care about their manufacturing job that went down to some other location in the world, and they're faced with rising household hydro prices. They have gas prices that they cannot afford. They have regressive health taxes that they didn't have before—and, of course, we were told by the government when they were running that they weren't going to have any new taxes. But no, we also have health taxes. They have health costs that they didn't have before because of the delisting of several services by this McGuinty Liberal government, like chiropractic and vision care.

What else? Well, those are people who have lost their jobs. They're going to have extreme difficulty in being able to deal with those kinds of rising costs and the kinds of new fees and removed opportunities from health care that this government has foisted on them. But do you know what? There's a whole other group of people. There's a group of people who are still working, but they're working at jobs that simply don't pay enough for them to be able to maintain a decent level of quality of life for their families. Sometimes they have to work two jobs, sometimes three jobs, just to be able to make ends meet. I can tell you that those people are even worse off than the ones who have had all of these Liberal policies hitting them in the pocketbook but they're still working at decent jobs. But there are so many more people whose income is simply not keeping up because their jobs are not paying a decent rate. The government really needs to look at what kind of standard of living we expect to have in a place like the province of Ontario if we maintain a minimum wage that does not provide a decent standard of living for the people who live in our communities.

It's those people who then end up, by sometimes the most unfortunate of events—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Horwath: As a result of some of the most unfortunate events—Mr. Speaker, I can't hear myself think.

The Acting Speaker: I've called for order once. I call for it again, please. I'm having difficulty hearing the debate.

1700

The member from Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only have a few minutes left, guys, so you can get back to your little get-together there in a minute or two.

The issue is that oftentimes, by unforeseen circumstances, people end up losing their jobs. What happens to those people? Well, it's obvious that their McGuinty Liberal government doesn't care about them either, because those people are losing the battle to have a decent quality of life. For example, they are people who are recipients of the Ontario disability support plan. Perhaps they are on a cycle and have had a job loss and are now relying on social assistance. But this government, notwithstanding the way they railed against the previous government for the way they treated people living in poverty—well, lo and behold, now we're stuck with this government that doesn't seem to care either about people who are living in poverty. That's just not acceptable.

We all know that a paltry 3% increase into your third year is simply not enough to be able to redress some of that extremely deep and debilitating poverty that exists in community after community all over this province. It's the social assistance rates; it's the ODSP rates. It's the fact that this government, notwithstanding a direct and straightforward promise in their election campaign, has not done the one thing that could immediately, just like that, affect the lives of so many hundreds of thousands of children in this province, and that is to stop the clawback. But they won't do it. They said they were going to do it and they still haven't done it. It's a disgrace, a shame on all of the government members who sit here in this House, that they have not done that one thing that would significantly alleviate child poverty in the province of Ontario.

I have to tell you that when you look at that income security piece, if you want to call it that, that piece of the provincial responsibility that deals with people who are extremely vulnerable and have income challenges, and then you look at their lack of action on the Tenant Protection Act file and their lack of action on a campaign commitment of building more affordable housing in this province, you've got to shake your head and wonder exactly why they wanted to become the government in the first place, because they're certainly not fulfilling any of the promises they made of the changes they said they were going to undertake when they became government.

You look around and you see manufacturing jobs going, you see poverty deepening, you see still the numbers of children living in poverty growing after over two years with this government in place, and then you also see the other things that that creates and another broken promise, another lack of commitment from this government, and that is the fact that these issues all have a bearing on what's happening in our cities. We're watching our cities in crisis. We watched Toronto in crisis all through the summer and continuing this week. Hamilton is in crisis as well. We're just waiting to see

when the next city is going to have to face some of the terrible things that are happening in the city of Toronto and in the city of Hamilton. We're having gun crimes occurring in the last couple of weeks in Hamilton at a rate that we've never seen. We see young people who are turning to street youth gangs because they don't have any options, because they don't have any hope, and they don't have support from their family groups and their government to be able to overcome some of the challenges they face.

We see city infrastructure falling apart. Guess what else we see? At the same time as we see all of those things happening, we see property taxes going up at the municipal level in unsustainable segments. When I talk to my previous council colleagues in the city of Hamilton, they're telling me that the people of Hamilton are just fed up. They're fed up with all of these broken promises. They're fed up with all of these new provincial taxes, provincial expenditures and the lack of problem-solving that they're seeing from their government. They're now getting their property tax bills and they're just shaking their heads. They're watching the lack of progress on infrastructure projects and they're watching the lack of movement around fixing the assessment system, and people are just besides themselves.

I have to say, I'm really going to be looking forward to voting in favour of this motion, because it speaks to the real issues that are facing the people of Ontario.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): The recent plant closure of Imperial Tobacco has been mentioned a number of times in the debate, so I thought it would be helpful if I read into the record what the local newspaper, the Guelph Mercury, had to say about the issue. I would like to note that this is not Liz Sandals speaking; this is an editorial in the local newspaper. It's entitled, "Liberals Shouldn't Fix Plant Closure."

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton): Please read it.

Mrs. Sandals: I am going to, thank you.

"Attempts by provincial Conservative leader John Tory and Waterloo-Wellington MPP Ted Arnott to pin the decision by Imperial Tobacco to close its Guelph operations on the Liberal government smack of political opportunism. The pair have resorted to taking political potshots without offering anything that resembles concrete solutions to help the over 550 employees soon to be out of work.

"Here is the question Arnott posed in the Legislature earlier this week: 'Will the Premier inform the House what his government is prepared to do to help the 550 workers at Imperial Tobacco in Guelph who are losing their jobs next year because of his government's policies?'

"Government policies—federal, provincial and municipal—have impacted Imperial Tobacco: Higher taxes and increased restrictions on smoking have hurt sales. But that's a good thing—we want people smoking less, and the savings to our health care system will be measured in the billions. Guelph-Wellington MPP Liz

Sandals was bold enough to admit as much on the day the closure announcement was made.

"But there are also a number of other factors, including globalization and the company's desire for a better bottom line that also played a significant role in Imperial Tobacco's demise, including free trade—a Conservative innovation in Canada—and the company's desire for a stronger bottom line—certainly not something a Conservative would protest.

"Here's what the provincial government should be doing for Imperial Tobacco and its workers: nothing." This is the hometown newspaper.

"The workers should be entitled to the same benefits any laid-off worker in this country gets, and after earning an average wage of \$84,000 a year, and with severance packages expected in the six figures a possibility, they should be fine.

"And any additional retraining costs should be borne by the company, not the government, especially given that Imperial Tobacco's parent company, British American Tobacco, announced yesterday that third-quarter earnings were up 23%.

"'It's going to be a vintage year,' chief executive Paul Adams told the Bloomberg News.

"Given that rosy outlook, it goes without saying that no government should be considering a bailout. The political consequences of offering financial assistance to a multinational tobacco company would be both swift and unusually harsh.

"So what are the provincial Conservative brain trust of Tory and Arnott suggesting that the government actually do? Not much. Arnott wants the government to launch an 'investigation into Ontario's industrial and economic competitiveness.'

"In other words, another expensive, time-killing government study.

"The Conservatives need to butt out on the Imperial Tobacco issue: this is one mess that can't be blamed on the Liberals."

That's what the local newspaper has to say on the issue.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): This important motion on Ontario's economy recognizes the hardships currently being endured by many families, including those who work for Imperial Tobacco, and of course our farm families and our businesses, large and small. It speaks to the factors that are threatening Ontario's present economic standing. This motion demonstrates something that we, all of us in this House, should demonstrate, and that is the utmost concern when jobs are being lost and hope diminished in Ontario.

We in this House have to be prepared to do something about it. I want to thank our leader for doing just that on issues concerning jobs and the economy in the province of Ontario.

The government should heed the substance of this motion. They should vote for it and give serious consideration to the urgent warning inherent in it.

1710

I also want to take this opportunity to publicly compliment our party's critic for economic development, the member for Halton. He has a breadth and depth of experience that he brings to this House and this debate. The member for Halton has been a very effective advocate for the kind of constructive economic policies that our government employed, and which were so successful during the years 1995 to 2003. During these halcyon days, when the provincial government's policies focused like a laser beam on the creation of new jobs, our economic and fiscal policies worked, and worked together. The economy grew at phenomenal rates, and we supported the creation of a million net new jobs right here in the province of Ontario.

At the mid-term point of this Liberal government, in contrast, we are seeing something very different to what happened under our tenure, but something that is very similar to the Peterson Liberal governments of 1985 to 1990. The current crop of Liberal MPPs in this House, members of the government side, are repeating the mistakes of recent Liberal history by taking job creation in the province of Ontario for granted, because they assume that somehow, perhaps by magic and the luck of geography and history, Ontario will always be an industrial and economic engine. They naively believe that job numbers will keep growing somehow without the policies to nurture and support that growth.

Look at the factors working against jobs and growth in this province today: higher provincial taxes; higher gasoline taxes; a higher dollar; higher natural gas prices; cancelled tax relief for small business; major increases in hydro bills; higher interest rates; and massive job losses in the manufacturing sector in Ontario, the province that should be the driving industrial force in Canada and throughout the global marketplace.

Last May, I tabled a resolution in this House focusing attention on the job creation challenges of our economy faced by our industries competing with and in dynamic economies like those of China and India. My resolution reads as follows:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the standing committee on finance and economic affairs should immediately begin an investigation into Ontario's industrial and economic competitiveness, to develop an action plan to maintain and expand our domestic and international markets in the coming years."

I've received support from a number of groups across the province. I would commend my motion to members of the government and ask them to act upon it and start by supporting this motion today.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm happy to join the debate today.

I want to pick up on a couple of things that have been said by previous speakers, the first one being from the member for Perth–Middlesex. I think the idea that what we're trying to do is create a framework for the economy to grow is a really important one. The reason that a lot of us ran, especially the new members, was that we saw the

fundamentals in this province crumbling because of what had happened with the previous government. So we know what we have to do is rebuild those fundamentals and put that framework in place.

The second comment I wanted to pick up on was from Mr. Yakabuski. He talked about the analogy of a renovation, and how when you start on a renovation, you think you're going to repair a certain number of things, and you realize as you go that the wiring isn't working or there is mould behind that wall. It's an interesting analogy, but it's a dangerous one for someone from that party, because I would contend—and I've actually talked about this with constituents—that every time we turn around, there's something else that needs to be fixed in this province because of what happened in the previous government. So I think the members opposite need to be a little bit careful about those analogies, but we'll certainly take that image. It's true that in every sector we look at, there's a mess that has been created that we're trying to unravel, whether it's energy, whether it's social services, whether it's education. We're trying to rebuild the fundamentals, put a plan in place and rebuild the public service, which was thrown into crisis. Of course, it was a previous member, Mr. Snobelen, when he was the Minister of Education, who talked about creating a crisis. That's exactly what happened. So here we are now in the position of having to rebuild.

I want to talk about the things that we are doing. There is no doubt, there is nobody on this side of the House who would argue that it's not important to support the working families of this province. There's a long list of enhancements we've put in place to do exactly what I said, which is to put that framework in place, rebuild our public services and create an environment that has been the tradition in this province, of civil society, the fundamentals of which were attacked under the previous government.

When we talk about rebuilding, I'm talking about things like the \$58 million for 4,000 new daycare spaces, for child care spaces. I'm talking about \$24.9 million for community support for services like Meals on Wheels. Those are some of the smaller investments we don't always talk about, but they are the things that affect people's lives on a day-to-day basis. Of course, there are the large investments, like our investment in post-secondary education, where we will have grants in place for students in need for the first time in years, where debt loads have gone up for middle-income and lower-income students. We recognize that we need a grant structure in place, and that that's a fundamental that needs to be rebuilt.

We talk about the \$360 million for medication for seniors and for people with high drug costs. We can talk about more teachers, about more repairs in our schools around the province, the teachers to deal with class size but also to deal with restoring music programs and phys ed programs, and to have librarians and guidance counsellors in place, all of those things, along with, if we look at the agriculture sector—I know previous members

have talked about this—the \$15-million increase to OMAF in the 2005-06 budget: a \$520-million investment in the ethanol growth fund; \$79 million to the grain and oilseed producers.

We can go through a long list of those huge investments we've made in this province, but the overall tone and direction we're going in is that we are making inclusive rather than divisive decisions. We are putting in place investments that bring people together, that build consensus around what this province is about. That is exactly why many of us ran, in order to do that, and that's what's happening. We're sorting those things out.

We have to look at what Mr. Tory says he will do. He says he will take \$2.4 billion out of our health care system, and that he will increase spending. That's exactly the formula that led us to a \$5.5-billion deficit and led us to the situation where we're having to rebuild. We have a plan to deal with that deficit, but I think the people of Ontario need to be very clear what the plan of the members opposite would be, which is to take \$2.4 billion out and invest. That leads to deficit, and that's exactly what we're trying to climb out of right now.

I think the other thing we really have to ask about is, where was this member, the Leader of the Opposition—who is now an advocate for the people of Ontario and for the people who are struggling in this province, for whom we're trying to create better conditions—when the previous government was tearing apart the fundamentals of this province?

I am a Toronto citizen. I have lived in this city for more than 20 years; I've lived in this region all my life. I was a citizen activist when that previous government was tearing this province apart. This member, who was a citizen of this province, of this city, working at Rogers Communication, was not to be seen. He was not an advocate for people. He was not an advocate against the damage that was being done. He was silent. He was not on the record. Maybe he was in the backrooms, but maybe he was in the backrooms supporting what was being done. So we have to ask whether people can change their stripes so entirely and all of a sudden be advocates for people for whom there was no support previously.

I am proud of our record. There's lots more to be done. I'm the first to admit there's a lot more to be done, and I look forward to doing it with this government.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I wish to address this motion with a focus on the slow burn that is devastating our manufacturing, our farm and our rural economies. Just to provide some perspective, when I worked in tobacco in the 1970s, there were 2,500 local tobacco farmers. Now we're sitting at about 650, and growing smaller. There is much more at stake than this. I'll make mention of the tobacco auction exchange in Delhi. It currently employs 140 people. I don't think I need to paint a picture of what's going to happen when this and other tobacco-dependent employment leave a community like Delhi. Delhi has already lost all three of its new car dealerships.

1720

As this government jacks up taxes and forces those who smoke or those who will continue to smoke away from regulated tobacco, essentially this government is propping up the underground economy, the contraband economy. It's really quite simple: If you jack up taxes, you jack up illegal consumption. You force legal producers and legal manufacturers to leave the country. We saw this equation at work in the recent Imperial Tobacco announcement to close their Guelph and Aylmer operations, to close the door on 600 jobs by heading south to Monterrey, Mexico. This is because of the McGuinty tobacco tax policy. I blame the Liberals. In many quarters, this is considered a Liberal scandal.

This also adds insult to injury in tobacco communities like Aylmer, where employment at the Aylmer threshing plant was once 450 strong. It declined over the years. Two years ago they lost 260 jobs. Fred Neukamm, chair of the tobacco board, has indicated very recently in the media, "We hope this is a wake-up call for government."

Clearly, for my tobacco farmers and the countless other jobs they support, it's time for this issue to be addressed by everyone involved in the industry, including the growers, manufacturers, exporters, the federal and this provincial government. Governments need to help. They need to help prepare a long-term plan for tobacco farmers and other industry sectors to exit from the industry. After all, this government and governments across Canada accrue something like \$9 billion a year in taxes from tobacco.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): For a couple of moments I want to address the opposition day motion that Mr. Tory moved, which is trying to suggest that the Liberal government is not working well with the economy. I'm reminded of what Bill Clinton said back in 1992, or it was told to him when he was campaigning. The famous words were, "It's the economy, stupid." Well, perhaps today we could say to ourselves, "It's the facts, stupid." I mean that as a general term. I'm not calling anyone stupid.

What are the facts? In June 2001, the unemployment rate—

Mr. Tascona: What are you talking about?

Mr. Berardinetti: The facts are the facts. The unemployment rate is currently 6.4%, the lowest it's been since June 2001. Ontario's economy is doing extremely well. In Woodstock, we've put in a brand new plant. Toyota is putting a plant there, which obviously means that they have confidence in the Ontario economy.

On top of that, if you go into other areas, retail sales are 4.8% ahead of what they were last year. Ontario car sales jumped 10.2% in July, 3.7% ahead of last year's pace. Solid profit growth is encouraging. Business investment: Ontario businesses plan to increase spending on machinery and equipment by 9.5% in 2005, the biggest increase since 1997.

The list goes on and on in terms of facts that I have in front of me. These are not skewed opinions. These are

facts that we've obtained from economists, that are available, that are public information.

While we're doing that, we're creating a better health care system and a better education system, which will attract new businesses because, in the end, what do new businesses want? They want to be located in a place where there's an educated workforce, a healthy workforce and an environment that will induce growth and produce more jobs. We're doing that. We're on track. I am convinced that the plan put forward by the Minister of Finance and our Premier is the right plan to keep Ontario moving.

We are now number one when it comes to auto manufacturing in North America. It's no longer Michigan, it's Ontario, and Ontario is continuing to move forward and become an economic power in Canada and in North America.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm pleased to be able to join with my colleagues in support of our party leader's motion.

Many of my colleagues have spoken of losses in manufacturing industries in their own ridings and the effects that these losses are having on their constituents. Jobs are at risk in my riding and throughout York region, like everywhere else, because of the increased taxes, the regulatory burden and the hydro increases of this Liberal government.

The cost of housing is continuing to go up, endangering housing starts and putting a first home out of reach of many first-time homeowners, particularly young families. What is most disturbing is that much of this increase in cost comes from government policy. Government policies are restricting the land supply for housing, increasing development charges and delaying approvals for housing projects.

According to the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, between September 2003 and July 2005 development charges in the GTA have increased by 27%. Charges for new apartments, the most affordable type of housing, have increased by almost 55%. Fear of the greenbelt has encouraged lot prices to skyrocket, increasing by 66% in three years.

Lloyd Martin, head of the Trimart group, said, "The greenbelt has created an illusionary shortage rather than a real shortage at this time. But it gives people who are landholders the idea that there's a shortage, so they can ask more for their lots. Some builders are buying at those prices just to stay in business, and keep their people employed."

Wait until the greenbelt starts creating a real shortage, when the supply of land completely runs out.

All of these government-inspired price increases will hurt housing starts, and they threaten jobs in our construction industry. With all our manufacturing job losses, we cannot afford to lose construction jobs as well.

The Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, from a study by economist Will Dunning, calculated that every \$1,000 added to the average cost of a new home means 1,015 fewer jobs; 284 fewer housing starts;

\$20 million less per year in government revenue; and \$2 million less a year in realty taxes.

It is time for this government to stop overtaxing and over-regulating home construction in Ontario. The government has the power to help our construction industry. It has the power to make it possible for young families to afford to buy their first home. All it needs is the will to act. It needs to recognize that its own policies are a major threat to the health of our housing industry.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? Is there any further debate?

Mr. Tascona: A shy guy.

1730

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly not shy. I just wanted to hear if there were more comments coming from the opposition, to listen carefully to the debate today, as we all are here.

When I look at the motion, it's suggested from the opposition that we should be looking at balancing the budget, keeping taxes down, managing prudently, and investing in higher productivity and a better quality of life.

I guess my question is, what the heck would they know about any of that stuff? You look at something like balancing the budget. Who are the official opposition to tell us about balancing budgets? We all know the mess this province was left in when we inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit, and you know, that's not just us saying that. That's not just a number that's been pulled out of thin air. That's a number that was verified by the Auditor General of the province. It's a number that was verified by the very Auditor General that that previous government appointed. So we're not talking about pulling numbers out of thin air here. The fact of the matter is—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like the member to confirm that it was not the auditor; it was a private consultant who was the previous auditor.

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order. Member, continue.

Mr. Duguid: If the member wants to quibble with that, I'm more than happy to agree with him. It was the auditor that their government originally appointed, that they had confidence in, obviously, because they appointed him. After his time at the province, he was hired as a consultant from the government to provide an accounting for what the deficit was at. I know the opposition doesn't want to admit it, because it's going to be their Achilles heel for many years to come. The previous government left this province in an absolute fiscal mess, and yet they're here today telling us that we should be working on balancing our budgets.

We had the announcement yesterday, the fiscal statement, and I can tell you, we are well on the way to cleaning up that Tory fiscal mess. We're very proud of the progress we've made to date. Their deficit's been cut more than in half, which is a significant benefit to the people of this province and a significant indication as to

what a government that's in office, that is managing well, can do.

In fact, that wasn't the only deficit they left us in. They also left us in an infrastructure deficit. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is here today, and he's doing an incredible job, investing in hospitals, investing in roads, investing in public transit, in record amounts of money. Despite the fiscal mess we inherited, we're still finding the money to move forward with these very, very important programs—programs that, frankly, the economic future of our province depends on, programs that went completely lacking under the previous government.

I look at other areas that they've talked about in here. They talk about quality of life, and we think, what did they do when they were in power to improve our quality of life? Well, they cut the welfare rates by 21%, and they celebrated that as a great thing to do. I remember, at the time when that was done, I was chairing community services in the city of Toronto. When has there ever been a time when we saw homelessness in the city of Toronto or across the province increase more than when they were in office?

It's a shame what they did when they were in office: cutbacks for homelessness, cutbacks to housing, abandoning building affordable housing in this province, absolutely forgetting about the importance of building affordable housing. When you think about what we've done in the short 24 months—5,230-some-odd housing units that are now being built in partnership with the province. That's 5,230-some-odd housing units more than what they did in their eight years—an incredible achievement.

I look back and think, what did they do in terms of helping people who needed to get those extra dollars to get into the few units that were available for those tenants under their administration? There was barely anything coming forward when it came to housing allowances. This government is moving forward with 5,000 housing allowances. Some 5,000 families are going to get access to some of those units that, under our government, are becoming available as we see the vacancy rates starting to go up in the rental housing market, starting to improve across this province.

When I think of all those families that were suffering in terms of trying to make ends meet, losing a job and maybe being \$200 or \$300 short on their rent and, because of the policies of this government, being put out on the street and evicted because they couldn't afford another \$200 or \$300 to catch up to their rent, I think of one of the first things we did when we got into office: a \$10-million rent bank that has helped tenants across the province stay in their homes until they can recover and get back to work, or recover from whatever illness put them out of their homes in the first place. That is progress. It contrasts greatly with what we've seen in the past from the previous government.

We hear the previous government talk about crime. We hear them talk about how tough they were on crime when they were in office. All I remember when it comes

to that—and that is a very important part of quality neighbourhoods, ensuring we are doing everything we can to reduce crime. All I remember from them is a bunch of guys walking around in those suits—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. Duguid: What do you call them, those suits that they used to wear?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The crime commission.

Mr. Duguid: The crime commission guys; a few of them are even friends of mine. They talked a mean game but they did very little to bring crime down.

I think of what the Attorney General announced just last week when it became apparent that the justice system they left behind here in the province—that in fact a number of people who had been arrested a couple of years ago in busts were going to be let out. A number of gang members were going to be let out because they didn't provide enough resources in the system for enough crowns to be able to take them through the system. I think how quickly our Attorney General acted to ensure that 32 more crowns are going to be put in place; to bring in and beef up more police officers for our guns and gangs unit—something that is going to have a very, very significant impact in our communities in Toronto—to ensure that we will get a handle on this guns and gangs problem, a problem that they ignored for eight years. They talked a mean game, went around and talked about crime commissions, but did barely anything to really try to resolve these particular serious problems.

In fact, I would suggest they exacerbated the problems, when I think back to what they did to our schools, community use of schools: one of the few places where our young people could go to and rely on for community programs. They decimated those community resources, in ensuring that schools were no longer going to be available for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. Order. I'm having a very difficult time. The heckling going around this speaker is enormous.

Please continue.

Mr. Duguid: I fully understand why they'd be very sensitive to these issues, because that's the legacy they left in our communities. We have young people now who are finally going to get access to recreation because of the \$20 million we're spending across this province in reopening up our schools, the schools that they closed down to our young people.

When I look at them talking about balancing the budget, when I look at them talking about managing prudently, when I look at them talking about us ensuring that we have productivity to improve quality of life across our province I've got to tell you, I can't take what they are saying today seriously at all. We're doing all of that, in spite of the problems that they created for us, in spite of the roadblocks that they put up in our way.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tascona: I'm very pleased to join in the debate on this motion. Can you set the time properly?

OK. I think the gist of this motion is basically that Liberal times are hard times. There is no doubt that what they're doing to this economy is causing great problems throughout.

I want to comment about the member across the way, who was saying, "Where was John Tory?" John Tory was chairing United Way campaigns, raising major funds for the United Way for five years. John Tory was chairing two campaigns for the inner city health centre for St. Mike's hospital. John Tory was recognized as the leading volunteer in the entire community and was awarded for that recognition in 2002. John Tory served on boards and committees for countless organizations, namely the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Famous People Players association and Community Living. John Tory was present and making a difference in other people's lives.

As I say, Liberal times are hard times for this province. The residential housing construction industry is almost at a snail's pace because of their policies. There's uncertainty in land development throughout the province. Rising energy costs are taking away people's disposable income, and also there are the job losses, which we've commented about. The residential construction industry, which is the backbone of the economy, is slowing and this government's policies are the main reason.

Another problem we have, and the members from Simcoe-Grey and Parry Sound can tell you this here today, is the volume of traffic on Highway 400. The lack of a plan to deal with the gridlock is unbelievable. The Liberal government has done nothing. The highways are clogged every morning. There are no alternative routes. I can tell you that our basic infrastructure, which is what we need to attract jobs to this province, is at a standstill because they are doing nothing on the highway portfolio.

This opposition day motion is very timely. The Liberal government certainly has not addressed the economy in terms of what we need to go forward into the future. They have no plan. As I say, Liberal times are hard times.

1740

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I don't always enjoy speaking in this place because it tends to be such an adversarial spot, with good guys and bad guys and all of that. I guess in the context of this resolution, I would observe in passing—it's something that one of my farm constituents shared with me once that I've always remembered—"Nobody would have remembered the good Samaritan if he hadn't had money." You can't look over your shoulder and help the vulnerable, and address the biggest single problem we're facing in Ontario, which is the growing gap between the richest of us and the rest of us—it's something I would candidly admit no government has done as adequately as they have should have in the last 15 years—without building a strong, prosperous economy.

We're doing what we can to try to shore that up. We're working as hard as we can, as diligently as we can

every single day, to try to get on top of the difficulties we have, some of which we've inherited and some of which are beyond our control, but we're struggling with it with integrity and we're going to make a difference in the province of Ontario.

Mr. O'Toole: I want to go on the record that the opposition day motion clearly is that the opposition is trying to put to you the importance of having a strong economy, so as to have the social programs and the quality of life Ontarians came to expect over the past eight years while we were in government.

When you came into government, the first thing you did was to break your first promise and to raise taxes. The next promise was to increase electricity rates. The impact on the agricultural economy of rural Ontario has been devastating. The forestry industry is now telling you a passionate plea—they've listened to John Tory this week—that your plan is simply not working for most sectors of the economy.

The interest rate is going to have a devastating impact on the economy. You're putting pressure on the economy. This will kill the auto and housing sectors. Most of the measures you're taking on sort of the monetary side of provincial control are having an adverse effect on the economy. The indicators are the GDP, the interest rate and the unemployment rate.

I put to you that for Ontario—the Minister of Finance—you have no plan for the hard-working families of Ontario. You have no plan for the economy of Ontario. You have no plan for the youth of Ontario. You have no hope for Ontario. What we're trying to tell you today is to pay attention to the hard-working families of Ontario so that there's a future left for our young people.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise in support of my colleague and our leader, John Tory, and his motion before the House today. I think all of us in the assembly who grew up in Ontario grew up in a province that was the lead province in all of Canada, a province of Ontario that was the economic engine that pulled the other provinces behind it, the kind of engine that had to be dragged kicking and screaming into a recession and was always the first one that came out and pulled the rest of the country behind. But not any more, not in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Higher taxes, higher hydro rates, higher costs of home heating, higher gas, runaway deficits and spending have resulted in an Ontario economy that is, at best, average in all of Canada, if not falling behind.

Maybe Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals are willing to settle for a middling economy, to strive for mediocrity. I suspect there is some enthusiasm: What if they became a have-not province? They'd get even more money from Ottawa. I certainly hope that's not the plan. But if the members disagree with me, then I want to see them stand up and fight to lower taxes in the province of Ontario; I want to see the members stand up in their seats and fight to get hydro prices under control and to abandon this wacky hydro policy that is costing us jobs

and taking money out of the pockets of working families in Ontario.

I don't think the members opposite—maybe they do, and I hope they do; I have not heard it yet—have any concern for the vulnerability of working families in the province of Ontario. As I mentioned today, almost 130% of a year's after-tax income is out in commodities vulnerable to interest rates, like mortgages and personal debts through credit cards. That makes them so vulnerable to increased interest rates. In fact, if interest rates go up as expected to about five or five and a half points in the time ahead, that would be about an \$1,800 additional cost to working families in Ontario, and \$1,800 more per annum for these working families is simply unaffordable.

On top of that, Dalton McGuinty mercilessly increased taxes with the health tax, through not following through on his promises on gasoline, through higher hydro costs, through user fees, and now we have privatized care for chiropractic and optometry in Ontario, taking more money out of working families' pockets. The total: some \$2,000 per year that working families have to find somewhere in their pockets, something they did not have to do before Dalton McGuinty was elected.

We've asked the Premier and the finance minister time and time again for some indication of how they're going to cut working families a break, how they're going to try to put more money back in their pockets. Not yet, after asking time and time again, have we had a single answer of satisfaction from the Premier or finance minister. They have no plan except to put their hands deeper and deeper into the pockets of working families, seniors and young people in Ontario.

I strongly support our leader's motion today.

The Acting Speaker: It is now time to put the question to the House.

Mr. Tory has moved that the Legislative Assembly call upon the government:

To recognize that Ontario's businesses, farmers and hard-working families are being pushed to the financial breaking point by higher electricity prices, higher fuel prices and increased taxes; and

To recognize that the McGuinty Liberal government has presided over 42,000 manufacturing job losses in the past year alone, causing serious financial hardship for families and communities province-wide; and

To recognize that the current government's fiscal and energy policies are placing increased financial pressure on large and small job-creating businesses, creating an uncertain investment climate; and

To keep its promise to "balance the budget, keep taxes down, manage prudently, and invest in higher productivity and better quality of life."

Addressed to the Premier of Ontario.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Tory has moved opposition day motion number 2. All those in favour will please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arrott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Scott, Laurie
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Sterling, Norman W.
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Tascona, Joseph N.
Chudleigh, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Tory, John
Flaherty, Jim	Martinuk, Gerry	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Berardinetto, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Bryant, Michael	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kennedy, Gerard	Racco, Mario G.
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Ramal, Khalil
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Craitor, Kim	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 24; the nays are 40.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion to be lost.

It now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands recessed until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1802.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2005 sur les mesures budgétaires (no 2), projet de loi 18, <i>M. Duncan</i>	
Adoptée.....	648
Loi de 2005 modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation (participation communautaire), projet de loi 19, <i>M. Fonseca</i>	
Adoptée.....	648

DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Violence faite aux femmes	
M ^{me} Pupatello	649
M ^{me} Witmer	651
M ^{me} Churley	652
Protection culturelle	
M ^{me} Meilleur	651
M ^{me} Munro	652

CONTENTS

Wednesday 2 November 2005

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Report, Environmental Commissioner	
Mr. Barrett	645
Cancer treatment	
Mr. Kormos	645
Common Ground Co-operative	
Ms. Wynne.....	645
Ministers' expenses	
Mr. Yakabuski	646
Detroit-Windsor tunnel	
Mr. Crozier	646
Cormorant population	
Mr. Runciman.....	646
Advocis	
Mr. Wilkinson.....	646
School principals	
Mr. Levac.....	647
Take Our Kids to Work Day	
Mr. McMeekin.....	647

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Standing committee on government agencies	
The Speaker	648
Report deemed adopted	648

FIRST READINGS

Budget Measures Act, 2005 (No. 2), Bill 18, Mr. Duncan	
Agreed to	648
Mr. Duncan.....	648
Education Amendment Act (Community Involvement), 2005, Bill 19, Mr. Fonseca	
Agreed to	648
Mr. Fonseca	648
City of Hamilton Act, 2005, Bill Pr22, Ms. Marsales	
Agreed to	648

MOTIONS

Committee report	
Mr. Caplan	649
Agreed to	649
House sittings	
Mr. Caplan	649
Agreed to	649

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Violence against women	
Ms. Pupatello	649
Mrs. Witmer.....	651
Ms. Churley	652

Drinking and driving

Mr. Takhar	650
Mr. O'Toole	651
Mr. Kormos	653
Cultural protection	
Mrs. Meilleur	651
Mrs. Munro	652

ORAL QUESTIONS

Economic outlook

Mr. Tory	653
Mr. Duncan	653, 658, 659
Mr. Hudak	658
Mr. Duguid.....	659

Hospital funding

Mr. Hampton	655
Mr. Kennedy	655

Water quality

Mr. Hampton	655
Mr. Kennedy	655, 657
Mr. Bisson	657

Electricity supply

Mr. Yakabuski.....	656
Mrs. Cansfield.....	656

Children's services

Mr. Milloy	657
Mr. Watson.....	657

Chedoke long-term-care facility

Ms. Horwath	658
Mr. Kennedy	658

Newborn screening

Mr. Tory	659
Mr. Kennedy	660

Tenant protection

Mr. Prue	660
Mr. Gerretsen	660

Workplace safety for students

Mr. Ramal	661
Mr. Peters	661

Volunteer firefighters

Mr. Arnott	661
Mr. Peters	661
Mr. Sterling	662

Political contributions

Ms. Churley.....	662
Mrs. Bountrogianni	662

PETITIONS

Services for the developmentally disabled

Mr. Tascona.....	662
Mr. Hardeman	663
Mr. Ouellette	665

Bridge replacement

Mr. Mauro	662
-----------------	-----

Gasoline prices

Mr. Ouellette.....	663
--------------------	-----

Public transit

Mr. O'Toole.....	663
------------------	-----

Health care services

Mrs. Witmer.....	663
------------------	-----

Mr. Hardeman.....

Mr. Hardeman.....	664
-------------------	-----

Cancer treatment

Mr. Jackson.....	663
------------------	-----

Mandatory retirement

Mr. Sergio	664
------------------	-----

Public accounting standards

Mr. Tascona	664
-------------------	-----

Queensway Carleton Hospital

Mr. Baird	664
-----------------	-----

Ontario farmers

Mr. Barrett	665
-------------------	-----

Illegal signs

Mr. O'Toole	665
-------------------	-----

Autism treatment

Mr. O'Toole	665
-------------------	-----

OPPOSITION DAY

Ontario economy, opposition day number 2, Mr. Tory

Mr. Tory.....	666
---------------	-----

Mrs. Mitchell	668
---------------------	-----

Mr. Chudleigh.....	669
--------------------	-----

Mr. Bisson	670
------------------	-----

Mr. Wilkinson.....	673
--------------------	-----

Mr. Yakabuski	674
---------------------	-----

Ms. Horwath	674
-------------------	-----

Mrs. Sandals	677
--------------------	-----

Mr. Arnott	677
------------------	-----

Ms. Wynne	678
-----------------	-----

Mr. Barrett	679
-------------------	-----

Mr. Berardinetti	679
------------------------	-----

Mrs. Munro	680
------------------	-----

Mr. Duguid	680
------------------	-----

Mr. Tascona	682
-------------------	-----

Mr. McMeekin.....	682
-------------------	-----

Mr. O'Toole	682
-------------------	-----

Mr. Hudak	682
-----------------	-----

Negativated.....	683
------------------	-----

OTHER BUSINESS

Visitors

Mr. Delaney	647
-------------------	-----

The Speaker	647
-------------------	-----

Mr. Klees	647
-----------------	-----

Mr. Kormos	647
------------------	-----

Mr. O'Toole	648
-------------------	-----

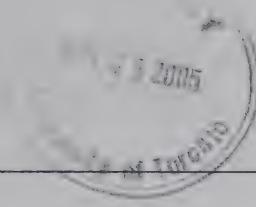
Mrs. Mitchell	648
---------------------	-----

Continued overleaf



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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 2 November 2005

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

**Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown**

**Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown**

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 2 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 1, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Hamilton East has the floor.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to continue raising some of the issues I think are important about the Bill 210 amendments to the Child and Family Services Act.

When I finished my debate yesterday, I said there were a few things I wanted to look at a little bit more closely in the remainder of my time, so I'll give you a bit of an overview of what those are. They include several issues: First Nations issues, some of the things that were missed in the process of the last review, some issues around aging out, and then funding of CASs overall. I'm going to hopefully divide my time into those four segments and then we'll see where we are at the end of that.

Since I closed my remarks last night, I thought I would start them tonight on the First Nations issues, and I thought a good way to bring that into the discussion was to share with you a piece I received that comes from a person who is executive director of the Weechi-it-te-win Family Services, which is a community-oriented and community-based native-staffed child and family services agency in the north. What George Simard, the WFS executive director, shares is The Story of the Elder. I think it provides an excellent framework for a discussion about the necessity, in fact the absolute requirement, of having the appropriate dialogue and the appropriate deference to the First Nations in regard to their children:

"A grandfather is asleep and is dreaming. In the dream, his granddaughter comes into the bedroom; he

senses her presence and he wakes up. His granddaughter's eyes are staring into his own eyes and each time he moves his body, her eyes remain focused on his. Finally, he asks her, 'Granddaughter, what is it you want?'

"She looks at him intently and asks this question: 'Granddad, during your lifetime what did you do to make it a better world for me when I grow up?'

"Upon hearing the question, the grandfather immediately awoke, his heart was palpitating, he was sweating, he was afraid because the thought came to his mind, what if all he could tell her was that all he ever did was maintain the status quo?

"The insight from this experience is why it is so important to be doing something for the other generations to come and is the motivation that moves WFS and me in particular."

I thought George's words were extremely moving and extremely pertinent to the discussion that we're having today on Bill 210.

I mentioned in my remarks the other day that there are particular issues that the First Nations have, not only with the bill but with the process by which the bill will move forward herein. I wanted to flag, first of all, that section 44 of the bill is the one that allows changes to the First Nations customary care agreements by regulation. What the First Nations are concerned about specifically is that these changes by regulation are at risk of occurring behind closed doors and without the proper airing and consultation with First Nations. Because these changes occur in regulations, they're also concerned that the scrutiny of this House will not be brought to bear on any changes that may come forward.

There is a real worry, I think a real legitimate point they have to make around the section that changes a particular arrangement they have with regard to care for their children who are in protected services. I raise that because I think it goes without saying that there are certain processes that need to take place and we should all be aware of what they are. They exist in the act under part X, and they're quite explicit with regard to the way that the ministry and all the agents of the government are supposed to be working with First Nations to ensure that the proper process is undertaken in engagement and dialogue with them.

1850

Part X indicates that, "The Lieutenant Governor in council may make regulations for the purposes of part X." There are very specific requirements in that section

that speak to “the apprehension of children and the placement of children in residential care ... the placement of homemakers and the provision of other family members in support services ... the preparation of plans for the care of children,” etc. It’s incumbent upon us, knowing these sections exist in the act, to make every effort to ensure that we’re adhering to those sections and engaging First Nations in an appropriate way in the discussion.

The other issue that has been raised with me is the extent to which the First Nations communities have been engaged thus far. My understanding is, and I’ve received many pieces of information from different communities that indicate that, yes, there has been some engagement with agency representatives in regard to this particular bill, but what there hasn’t been is an engagement with the political leadership of First Nations. I would urge the government to ensure that the political leadership is engaged thoroughly in this process, because it’s, frankly, incumbent upon us to make sure their voices are strongly heard and are taken into consideration in every aspect of the way we go through this bill.

It seems to me my friend Peter Kormos needs a little bit of rest in the front row. He’s having sleep apnea problems. He told me he only gets 45 minutes at a go when he has to sleep. He says he has back problems, and therefore can’t get more than 45 minutes at a stretch. So Mr. Kormos, if I’m putting you to sleep, you’re welcome to use the couches in the back. Perhaps I’m good for your back.

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: Oh, is that right? Well, I don’t want to talk about your urinary tract issues, Mr. Kormos. However, I do appreciate that you’re here tonight for this very important debate on Bill 210 because it really indicates that there are people here who are concerned about the welfare of our children, and that is what Bill 210 is all about.

Notwithstanding that minor distraction from my friend Peter Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre, I needed to make sure that I was starting my discussion tonight particularly about the issues being raised by the First Nations community. I want to read from a letter I received from some of the representatives of First Nations, just to indicate to you not only the fact that they need to have some serious dialogue with government around Bill 210, but that there are other issues with which they are concerned.

There is a letter that was sent to the minister back in August of this year, and it was sent by Betty Kennedy, executive director of the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario. One of the things she put on the record with the minister is the fact that—I’ll quote right from her letter:

“At this time, I would like to identify one of these issues that relate to the designation process of our pre-mandated agencies. We would like this process to be clearly identified and would welcome receipt of all criteria for each stage in the designation process as well as the specified timelines in order to assist our member agencies more effectively. A number of them have iden-

tified significant delays in moving through this process and have requested our assistance in determining why these delays are occurring. If we could begin to develop our working relationship by clarifying these matters....”

The First Nations peoples are on record with the minister in many different ways. I raise this letter because it points out a desire for a dialogue to occur on an issue that is not contemplated in Bill 210. It’s another issue that was raised by First Nations peoples around the designation process for their community agencies and some frustration around identifying what the roadblocks are to allowing those designations to take place, but it’s not actually within the scope of Bill 210. I raise it because there are many issues to do with child welfare that did not receive scrutiny and are not contemplated in Bill 210 in terms of changing the system.

This bill will go to committee. I know it will, and there are lots of positive—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Will this bill go to committee?

Ms. Horwath: The member for Niagara Centre is asking me, “Is this bill going to committee?” I can tell you that last time we debated this bill, which was just yesterday, the Conservatives and the New Democrats were both calling for this bill to travel. We’re encouraging the minister and we hope the government will hear our pleas to ensure that this bill not only goes to committee, but that that committee actually travels to the communities that are being affected by the changes it’s contemplating. I’m hoping that we soon have a list of all of the communities that are requesting those hearings, but we certainly have put the marker into the government that that needs to be done.

I wanted to spend just a few minutes on some of the issues that are missing from the bill. They are missing from the bill because they really weren’t part of the review. That speaks to something that we perhaps would like to see changed, and that is the scope of the mandatory five-year review. It is very clear that the review that took place elicited a number of responses outside of the actual scope that was determined by the minister. Of course, the act requires the five-year review to take place. I don’t know what section it is; the very last section, I think. Yes, part XII, the miscellaneous part of the act requires the review of the act but it also allows, through the discretion of the minister, the scope of that review. In this very first review of the act, it became very clear in the responses that were received that there are many issues that people want to have reviewed and scrutinized by the government, with a view to maintaining and continuing along the pathways of improvement in the child welfare system.

There’s much literature that would support the review to be expanded and to have a broader context. It’s some of those issues that are incumbent upon us as a government, as a group of legislators, to look at, if we’re really interested in changing the well-being of children in our province.

I wanted to set the ground for that by quoting from a research document that reviews child protection legislation in Ontario—past, present, and future. There's one small piece in here that speaks to that broader context. It says, "Recent social policy reviews in Canada have identified systemic risks to child safety such as family violence and poverty. A broader context to evaluating the impact of child welfare policy that includes the major predictors of risk to vulnerable children is necessary to address" ongoing change. I say that this is something we would like to see happening, something we would support, that broader overview, because we firmly believe—and I certainly firmly believe—that there are things this government can be doing that could change the welfare of children at this very moment. I don't want to simply repeat the things we often repeat in this House with regard to more affordable housing and ending the child benefit clawback and ensuring there is a decent level of social assistance available to families. Yes, those things are all important, but it's not just us on this side of the House who are raising these issues.

1900

I turn to a report that was provided, undertaken by a group of academics at the University of Western Ontario in London, the Association of Poverty with Child Welfare Service and Child and Family Clinical Outcomes, who flag many of these very issues themselves. So, again, it's not simply the opposition saying that there needs to be a serious look at and recognition of these factors. This is what's coming out in all of the literature that speaks to the issue of child welfare.

I thought this one particular section is important. It indicates, in looking at poverty and child outcomes: "Studies include factors such as nutrition and brain development, suggesting poverty and, specifically, poor nutrition, place children at risk for later learning, behavioural and developmental challenges...."

"A second theme suggests that the instability of living arrangements," a.k.a. housing, "and homelessness due to poverty place children at increased risk.... This may reflect the inability of children to receive consistent educational opportunities and parent(s) to develop a social network of support to buffer parental stress."

All of this is very logical stuff. It seems to me that this logical piece here is something that's missing from the bill and from the review that was undertaken, because unfortunately that review was scoped very narrowly to deal only with the adoption of crown wards.

Another "encompassing framework within which to view the effects of poverty on children is provided by Avison et al. (1994). These authors suggest that the 'pernicious' effects of poverty"—did you like that word, Peter Kormos? Pernicious.

Mr. Kormos: Spell it. Don't; no.

Ms. Horwath: It's not a spelling bee, Mr. Kormos.

However, "the 'pernicious' effects of poverty are such that the financial strain results in the combined effects of caregiver strain, lack of social support, lowered self-esteem and maternal distress resulting in childhood vul-

nerabilities reflected in both internal and external problems."

This report goes on to cite a number of factors that the opposition, that the New Democrats, are constantly raising with this government. If this government were serious about the welfare and well-being of children, they would start addressing some of these fundamental, root causes of the crises we're seeing in children's well-being, or lack thereof, in Ontario.

"Child maltreatment in Canada is particularly related to," one study says, "the major environmental conditions of which low socioeconomic status and housing conditions play a significant role." Again, the ability of parents to provide for their children has a significant effect on the well-being of those children, something that is not a surprise to anyone but needs to be addressed in a most fundamental way by the government.

"This 'economic-deprivation' hypothesis reflects the inability of parents to meet basic needs such as housing, creating instability that can lead to increasing stress on adults," which then could result in parental violence.

I could go on and quote many more pieces of this particular study, but what parts of it do is to situate child abuse within a broader social context, suggesting that it's not an isolated family problem but a community problem, most often related to the social and economic situation of the locale. Also, they note that it "reflects increases in social isolation and compromised ability to meet basic childcare needs." I would put to you that after several years of reductions, and then the flat-lining of things like social assistance, policies like the clawback of the national child benefit very much affect the socio-economic situation of families in today's Ontario.

There are also indications of cases where children are exposed to family violence, and issues around battered women. Considering the fact that we started the spousal abuse prevention and awareness month, or violence against women month, whatever we want to call it in today's nomenclature, I think that an important factor we need to recognize is that very few victims of family violence have the resources to actually begin a new life for themselves and their children. This, as well, affects the welfare of the children of Ontario.

In talking about what was missing in the bill brought forward, I thought I should just rely on the report that the government tabled in March 2005: the report on the 2005 review of the Child and Family Services Act. Just to wrap up my comments on that piece, there are a number of issues that were flagged. A number of the respondents to this review indicated the very thing that I indicated, that there is a concern that the review was too narrow, that the five-year review needs to be broadened out and expanded, that the minister's ability to scope the review very narrowly needs to be rethought. If we're to get through proper and more broadly based reforms in a timely fashion, as the child welfare system continues to change and the needs of children continue to change and the world in which we live continues to change, then perhaps what we need to do is ensure that the review is broadened out every five years.

Again, not unlike some of the comments I just made, people indicated to the minister and the ministry that services do not function in isolation, and it's detrimental not to change one system without consideration of other systems such as children's and adult mental health, youth justice, social assistance and education.

Issues were raised around a number of different points: the justice system, children's rights and youth justice. There are a number of pieces that people raised and wanted to ensure were recognized around adoption records and privacy. All of these kinds of issues were raised and were noted in the report itself that was produced in March 2005. It's important to note that the minister had a choice on how to scope it, and the ministry's own executive summary indicates that they focused on "key provisions of the legislation relating to permanency options for children in care, including adoption." I think that's one of the pieces we would like to see changed. We would certainly like to be looking at, in the process of the hearings, if there's an opportunity to perhaps broaden out the scope of the five-year review. This having been the first one, it's now our chance to say, "Did it work? Did it meet our needs? Are there things we can do to change it, to make it better, to make it more responsive?" It's not for any of our benefits, it's not for us to be able to gain anything by that, but for the children of Ontario, particularly children affected by this legislation, to be able to have positive outcomes. That's the goal we've all stated and will continue to state, I'm sure, through this entire process.

There was one issue raised in the document, and that was the issue of aging out. I wanted to spend a little bit of time on that because I thought it was an interesting fit with some of the things we're seeing in terms of children on the streets, the violence that's occurring and some of the choices—in fact, I wouldn't even call them choices—some of the circumstances children find themselves in these days. In particular, I wanted to talk about the way we deal with the aging-out issue. In this particular situation, perhaps it needs to be relooked at.

1910

In the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' strategic plan for a flexible, sustainable and outcome-oriented service delivery model of July 2005, there is an acknowledgement of the issue of aging out. I should actually stop and say what aging out is. It is the time which a child has been under care of the children's aid society, has been a ward of the crown, for certain points in their life. But of course, "aging out" means they've gotten to the point of their life where they are an adult, or are considered to be an adult, and are no longer eligible for the care of the state.

I wanted to indicate here that, yes, this has been flagged, and I appreciate that the ministry is aware of this concern. There are extended care maintenance agreements that can be undertaken with these young people up to the age of 21 to help them transition into the adult world with the ability to take care of themselves. But many jurisdictions are finding that that age of 21 no

longer reflects today's realities. I mentioned it just yesterday in this debate as well. In fact, I had a couple of chuckles from some of the members behind me here yesterday when I raised it. Young people are not leaving home at the age of 21 so much any more. Young people are staying home into their mid- to late 20s to make sure they are able to put together a future for themselves that is going to be successful and determine—

Mr. Kormos: How old is Julian now?

Ms. Horwath: My son is only 13. In fact, I bought a dog for my son recently, and I said to him, "Honey, this dog is going to live about 13 years, the same age as you are now. That dog is going to be around for a long time. It's your dog, so when you move out of the house, you'll be taking the dog with you," and he said, "Mummy, I'm never moving out of the house." That just reflects, though, that there is an opportunity for us to relook at and rethink the age at which we start to withdraw our supports for these young people.

I actually put together a very few pieces that I thought were important around that aging-out issue. I mentioned it briefly yesterday, but Carol Goar wrote an excellent article outlining this issue that was published in the Toronto Star on Friday, October 28. She goes through the description of what happens to young people when they age out, when the system that has become their parent or their caregiver, for lack of a better word, withdraws and the difficulty and the transitioning that needs to happen for them to be successful.

In researching this issue a little bit more closely, I was surprised to find how blatant and how stunning the statistics are for children as they age out of that system. I wanted to share some of it with you tonight because I think it's extremely important. It's a piece that we really do have an opportunity to affect, perhaps in this very bill, and perhaps not, but it's worth putting on the record only to remind ourselves that if we are committed to doing it, we can get it done this time around. It's an issue that really needs to be addressed by legislators.

This is a document called Youth Leaving Care—How Do They Fare? There's a little bit of a rhyme going on there. It's a briefing paper that was prepared in September 2005 for the Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults Project. It was specifically put together to put some recommendations in place that respect the challenges facing youth leaving care. It states:

"The findings show that, compared to their peers, youth aging out of care are more likely to:

—leave school before completing their secondary education;

—become a parent at a young age;

—be dependent on social assistance;

—be unemployed or under-employed;

—be incarcerated/involved with the criminal justice system;

—experience homelessness;

—have mental health problems; and

—be at higher risk for substance abuse problems."

It seems to me that if these are the outcomes that we know are occurring for youth who are aging out in the current system, then it speaks volumes to the fact that we need to change that system so that those outcomes can be changed to be more positive for those youth.

In fact, Canadian youth aging out of care have cited the following requirements as being crucial to better transition to adulthood and to perhaps positively affect these outcomes. They indicate that there is a need for ongoing, supportive relationships, peer support and independent living training, increased access to financial support, and support in gaining access to education, employment and training programs.

In other words, it's not good enough to say, "We'll keep financially supporting you for a little while, but here's your hat. What's your hurry? You're on your own." That simply has not proven to work, and I would say that if we can invest in some of these transition programs now, in the transition process, then we'll be not only economically saving a lot of money at the end of the day in some of these other systems, but holy smokes, we'll be giving youth, young people, a fighting chance at making a go of adult life after having been in custody and care and aging out of that system.

International research indicates that there are better outcomes for youth aging out when they complete their high school, when they have access to post-secondary opportunities and role models, when they refrain from alcohol and drug use, when they obtain life skills and independent living training, and when they experience stable placements while in care. I think the stable placements part is, in fact, in some ways, addressed by Bill 210. In fact, I think Bill 210 in many ways looks at that very issue of stable placements, but I think there is much, much more that can be done.

In fact, there are recommendations on page 4 of this report, specifically to the Ontario government, and I'm going to read them out, because I think they need to be on the record in this discussion. They're suggesting that we extend the maximum age at which youth can continue to receive the extended care and maintenance allowance from the current age of 21 to the age of 24 to enable them to achieve higher educational attainments and working skills; ensure that the ECM, the extended care and maintenance, allowance reinstatement provision is consistently applied across all children's aid societies in Ontario; increase the maximum ECM allowance to reflect current living costs; and incorporate an annual indexation provision.

It continues on with about a dozen—maybe not quite—short-term or immediate recommendations, and then goes on to talk about some of the research and academic work that needs to be done in the future to continue to track and be sure that we are keeping tabs on our successes, hopefully, for children who are aging out of the system.

So I just wanted to indicate that aging out, I think, is an important and relevant issue, that we need to get a grip on that, that we need to provide young people with that

extra boost to be able to become successful as they age out of the child welfare system. It's something that many other jurisdictions have done, and research shows that where the changes are made in terms of the age for extended maintenance and care funding—in other jurisdictions, when young people are reaching the age of entering post-secondary education, their tuition is covered by government, and so they don't have to worry about ensuring that they can afford post-secondary education, because it is part of the supports that the government is putting in place to make sure that they are able to achieve some success later in life.

There's one issue that I raised the other day, and it's the issue of resources to the children's aid societies. I know there's an initiative underway at this moment in time to look at the funding of children's aid societies to determine what the new model might look like, what the new requirements are going to be and how those requirements relate to the funding. So I understand that that's currently something that's being reviewed. I can't say enough how important it is to make sure that we resource the children's aid societies to a level that is reflective of the extremely important job we've been giving them to do. I think of the pressure that's on children's aid societies right now, the difficulty, the struggle they have, year in and year out, trying to meet the needs of children and families, trying to make sure that children who are in need of care are getting that protection, trying to make sure they're doing that in a way that meets the requirements of the law.

1920

I know my own executive director of the children's aid society in the community I come from has indicated to me that those legal costs—and again, they are important. We have to make sure we're doing everything within the parameters of the law, but those very costs are driving the budgets of children's aid societies out of whack. It's incumbent on all of us to recognize that that funding situation has been very difficult for quite some time now, for several years. It's actually in some ways a miracle that some of these children's aid societies have been able to continue to provide the good service they have in the communities where they're doing that good work.

In that context, I got an e-mail from a woman in my riding and it reflects the level of frustration that people have. This wasn't particularly about a child protection issue, but it was an issue where this woman was trying to get some service from the children's aid society. I'm going to read a little section of it, and I've already told her I'd be doing this. I'm not going to use her name, because there's a privacy issue, but I did want to read it because I think it speaks to the frustration people have. I think people just don't realize the level of strain that CASs have been under. This woman sent me this e-mail in the middle of September and she said, "The reason I'm e-mailing you is concerning the adoption legislation and my ability to seek out information regarding my file and adoption records." Initially, I thought this was about the

adoption bill that we just passed the other day, but in fact she goes on to say, "It has become apparent to me that the funding provided for the children's aid society, specifically for persons to search out one's file, is completely inadequate. I am currently 28 years old, I applied for my records earlier this year, and was just informed that due to a huge backlog and lack of funding for such services, my application for information will be at least five or more years in waiting, as they are currently only working on applications submitted in 2001."

We went through the process of debating and passing the adoption bill, and to a great extent that bill was a result of many years of hard work by the NDP member from Toronto—Danforth, Marilyn Churley. She was in tears the other day with all of the people who were so pleased that that bill has finally made it through the Legislature. But for people who were crown wards, whose files exist within the filing cabinets of the children's aid societies, there is perhaps another barrier to obtaining those records.

Having said that, she did contact me today to say that there is hope, that in fact instead of it being five years, it may be two years, it may be a year and a half, and I guess that's better than nothing. But it is certainly the case that the funding formula and the resources required for the children's aid societies to do a decent job is sorely in need of repair.

I wanted to finish my comments by reiterating how much I look forward to hearing some of the detailed presentations that will come about when this bill goes through the appropriate process of committee hearings, because I think as we hear from people, and now that they see the legislation in writing, we'll be able to get some really positive insights into how to move forward in the child welfare system and how to move forward with this particular legislation.

I really think that taking some time out to make sure we get it right is so important. It's so important for children and their families, and it's so important for people who have been trying to adopt children in Ontario and haven't been able to do so because the barriers have prevented them from being able to achieve those positive outcomes for the children and for those people looking to adopt. It's just so important to get it right that I look forward to those public hearings, and I sincerely hope that the government takes that step and ensures that public hearings take place.

I'm adamant in my belief that those public hearings can't just be here in Toronto, that children's aid societies and providers of these kinds of services across the province want to have something to say. I reflect back again to the voices we need to hear from First Nations. Maybe it's not convenient to travel these bills out to these kinds of communities, but it's incumbent upon us, it's required of us, it is our obligation to make sure that we take the time to engage in a dialogue with First Nations about their children and about their needs in terms of child protection. If we don't do that, if we were not committed to making that effort, it would be a dark

day in this Legislature, because it is so extremely important that I cannot overstate how important it is that we get that done.

I wanted to make sure, as we go through that process of the hearings, that there is also some of the work that's been done around the extent to which during the process—I can recall going through the briefing with the minister and her staff. There's this chart here that is extremely complicated, but they took us through it piece by piece to describe the various stages that will occur in the process of a child being taken into care. One thing I want to flag that I'm hoping to hear about during the hearings is the extent to which children have choices, or that choices are available through all of the stages of this process. I know there are choices around kinship care and around openness of adoption, but I think we have to be extremely careful to make sure that, as we go through every stage, we're flagging where choices can be made by children who are going through the stages of being taken into care.

I wanted to say also that when it comes to putting amendments, I know the minister has some amendments already prepared. I know she has looked at pieces of the legislation around accountability and a process for complaints, and I'm pleased about that. As I mentioned yesterday, New Democrats had also flagged that there were some concerns there. We also wanted to again put on the record some concerns about, or at least we're keeping an eye on, the alternative dispute resolution piece. We want to make sure that works. We want to make sure that it's a process that is respectful of the rights of all parties, so we're very careful to keep an eye on that and are looking forward to hearing if there are comments about that piece in the public hearings process.

I wanted to end by saying that it has been a very positive experience for me, as my first leadoff speech on a bill in this House, to be able to speak to this particular bill, because I think it's an important piece of legislation. I think if we work on it and if we keep an open mind and a broad dialogue, we'll get to a place where the welfare of children is always our top priority. Thank you very much, and I look forward to public hearings on the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): First of all, I would like to commend the member from Hamilton East for her remarks, a number of them, of course, in support of Bill 210. Before beginning, I'd also like to commend the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers, for bringing not only her considerable wisdom but I would also say her humanity to this particular file.

As Senator Hillary Clinton said, when asked, "What does it take to raise a child?" in the now famous phrase, "It takes a village." The McGuinty government is creating that village, whether it's our programs regarding health care or education, but in this particular file, the idea of being able to offer to children in need, youth at risk, stable opportunities for growth, for long-lasting families and for a continued bonding, which of course all

of us know is extremely important in terms of development, whether it's physical or mental, and for things like self-esteem.

1930

That's why I'd like to commend the minister on the various components of this particular bill, whether it's making adoption more flexible or removing some of the legal constraints, some of the red tape that is involved in that long procedure that was referred to by the member from Hamilton East; for example, from the first intervention of children's aid, when there's an assessment, when there's a placement and when, unfortunately, there's a replacement, meaning an ongoing shuffle of the particular foster family. We all know how disruptive that can be to all individuals concerned and we all know how certain legal frameworks that are still in place interfere with the long-term placement, which is ultimately not in the best interest of the children themselves whom we are here to serve.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I want to congratulate the member for Hamilton East for her first leadoff speech here on Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

I know it is customary and obligatory to speak to a bill when you're doing a response in this House, but I'm asking for a little bit of latitude to talk about my page, because the pages will be leaving us tomorrow. Tomorrow will be their last day. I want to commend and congratulate the wonderful group of pages that we've had in the Legislature this term. We were privileged to have this great group of young people with us. But I want to specifically talk about Loreena Dobson, a page from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, coming from—what her grandfather will absolutely tell you is the truth—Cobden, the centre of the universe.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Cobden?

Mr. Yakabuski: Cobden, yes. You know her grandfather, Hal Dobson. If any of you know the story about the repatriation of Champlain's astrolabe and bringing it home to Cobden, Mr. Dobson played an integral role in that exercise.

Mr. Kormos: What's the story?

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, we don't have enough time to go through the story, I say to the member from Niagara Centre, but I do want to say what a pleasure it has been to have Loreena here to serve as a page in this Legislature and what an honour it's been as her member. I also had the honour of having her sister, Emma Dobson, last year. So for two fall sessions in a row, I've had girls from the Dobson family. Their parents, Grant and Dorothy, are justifiably proud of those two wonderful girls. I'm very proud to serve as their member here for the riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, and I want to commend and congratulate the program and all those who have served.

Mr. Kormos: I want Mr. Yakabuski, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, to know that all of us in this chamber share his high regard for the young page

from his riding, and a year ago her sister, who served this Legislature well.

Ms. Horwath, our critic in these matters, has laid the groundwork quite well and quite thoroughly. Her analysis is clear. Make no mistake about it, there was nothing in what she said that committed New Democrats to joyous applause with respect to this legislation. There are more than a few pieces of it about which we have some very serious concerns, and Ms. Horwath made that very clear during her comments. She has every intention of pressing rigorously and without pause to ensure that aboriginal communities, native communities, are heard around the issues they have with this legislation and with what very much appears to be a clear failure to have consulted, or at least consulted effectively, with those communities.

The next speaker on behalf of New Democrats is going to be Shelley Martel, our member from Nickel Belt. I urge people who indeed are watching the legislative channel at 25 minutes to 8 to stay tuned, because if indeed Ms. Horwath displayed passion and commitment to the issue, Ms. Martel will bring even heightened levels of enthusiasm about the welfare of children and this government's responsibility to craft appropriate amendments to make sure that those children are adequately protected.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to express my appreciation for the thoughtful comments I've heard from all members in the House yesterday and today. It's clear that this is a very important piece of work, a very important piece of legislation, and it's good to know, but certainly not surprising, that others share our government's commitment to protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

I want to specifically refer to two areas that have come up a couple of times, one on First Nations involvement, and I want you to know that section 44 is indeed intended to provide us with the flexibility required to accommodate the needs of the First Nations people and their specific requirements for their kids and their specific challenges. We will not take those lightly. We will take them very, very seriously and we intend that they will have tremendous influence on how we arrange for their kids to be protected under this legislation. I don't for one minute have any problem making that commitment.

The other reference I'd like to make is to the whole matter of the definition of community, which came up a couple of times. Community, as we have presented it, is intended to be more inclusive. It's not meant to restrict but in fact to define in broader terms examples of how a child can find circumstances with which they would be comfortable.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Hamilton East, you have two minutes to reply.

Ms. Horwath: I want to thank the members for Etobicoke North, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Niagara Centre and the Minister of Children and Youth Services for their discussion on my leadoff speech. I have to say

that I look forward to the next phase of this bill. I look forward to the process by which we will hear the voices, particularly of the First Nations. I look forward to the way that engagement will occur. I look forward to other voices coming to the table to share their issues, their concerns and perhaps their accolades in the various pieces of this bill.

I also look forward to, hopefully, some opportunities for amendments, particularly around things maybe like aging out, particularly around the scope of the review that takes place. But I'm waiting to hear from the people who come to speak to committee on this bill, assuming of course that we're going to have a public hearings process. I hope that's the case.

I wanted to reiterate that we want to see children have choices every step along the way, and that the options we see in the first step of the process are then reflected again and again so that children have as many options as possible, so that they can achieve the things that any child raised anywhere in Ontario would hope to be able to achieve for their future—a future that is bright, productive and one that they can be proud of themselves in.

1940

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It is my pleasure to introduce a visitor in the gallery from the beautiful city of Brampton, a former member from Brampton, Bob Callahan, a city councillor in the beautiful city of Brampton. Welcome, Bob.

The Deputy Speaker: That, of course, is not a point of order, but we certainly welcome our former colleague.

Further debate.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward—Hastings): I'm delighted to speak to this bill, and I will be sharing my time with the member for Peterborough.

There's a great deal to this bill, and I'm going to focus on a part that I think really profoundly provides opportunities for improving the quality of life for our children. Quite frankly, that is what this bill—and what I like to think our society—is about. What I'd like to do is talk about how the system presently works and how it will work if this bill is passed.

Children come into CAS care a number of ways. Some are voluntarily given into care by parents who say, "I'm simply not able to provide the care they need. I recognize that I need help on this," and I applaud them. Others come into care because someone has alerted the children's aid society to what they believe may be abuse and a child in need of protection.

I need to say to those of you who are watching this evening and are thinking, "Well, really, it's none of my business what happens in that house, and I shouldn't get involved," that it is your business. We have a responsibility as a society to ensure that our children are protected, and every child in your community and in this province is our child. You don't need to give your name, but you do need to call your CAS if you fear that a child is at risk.

The CAS investigates. There is a sense in society that the CAS comes and takes away children. The CAS

doesn't come and take away children. The CAS becomes involved when they believe a child is in need of protection, but ultimately a judge makes a decision as to what's in the best interests of that child. It's as simple as that. A child who is deemed to be in need of protection may go to school in the morning and the CAS may meet them there and bring them into care. This is a child who, in many cases, goes to school and never, ever returns home, or the child may be at home and the CAS comes and removes them from that home for their own safety.

In the years the family and I have fostered, I have never been able to fully appreciate the trauma of leaving your parents in the morning and never returning. With every child we have ever had the privilege of fostering, I think we can say that they loved their parents and their parents loved them. There may have been inappropriate actions, but there was love in that house. It is an absolute trauma, and I think the vast majority of us, thank goodness, never have any sense of how difficult it is for that child.

At the present time, that child may be placed in what's called an "emergency receiving home" or they may be placed directly into a foster home. From the child's viewpoint, they have been taken and placed with strangers. I want to say that we have great foster homes in this province. We are blessed with hundreds of foster homes that truly care. But from the child's viewpoint, they're strangers.

This bill will enable a society to make arrangements with extended family or friends or those who have been involved in that child's life and are meaningful—

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Grandparents.

Mr. Parsons: Grandparents.

Mr. Levac: Very important.

Mr. Parsons: Now, this doesn't make the work of the CASs easier; it makes it harder, because they have to ensure that when they're placing that child with an extended family or friends, that child is still in a place of safety and that those who are alleged to have committed the abuse won't show up there and intimidate the child or take the child. But for the child, think of the difference between being placed with strangers at 11 o'clock at night or being placed with grandparents. This will not always be the case, but this is an option that's being added in this bill to ensure that the children will have some degree of comfort.

The next thing that happens after that is that there's an appearance in court, probably without the child present. But eventually there is a court case. We can't, again, imagine the stress on a child, knowing that they're in this foster home, and they may have put down some roots, but they know that somewhere there's a judge and there's a court case being heard, so maybe they'll leave that night and maybe they won't. Maybe somebody will come back and say, "Well, it's been remanded." So they will live in a constant state of, "Am I going to stay here or am I going to move?" We're talking about kids who are four, five and six years old. If the court drags on for a year, for a 4-year-old, that's a quarter of their life that they've

been in animated suspension waiting to know what happens. For foster parents, it is equally difficult because, folks, it is impossible to foster a child without forming a bond with them, and the only bad part about being a foster parent is the day that the child moves on. It may be to a wonderful adoptive home, and it may be great for the child, but it's a difficult day for the foster parents, I can assure you.

This new bill says that we don't necessarily need to go to court. Maybe there is mediation that can take place between the agency and the birth parents or the family to see if there can be a result found to allow that child to move on to a place of safety and permanency fairly quickly. This bill says there are opportunities that don't necessarily require one or two years of court hearings to make it happen. Again, that child will have the benefit of some permanency fairly quickly.

Many, many of the court orders given now for children who come into care—they become what are called "crown wards," meaning that the birth parents have forfeited their rights and the crown is now responsible for that child. The majority of them are crown wards with access, which means, although that child will never return home, there is opportunity for visitation. Because of that interaction between the child and their natural family, no adoption takes place, so that child will spend their life in a foster home. I've got to repeat, I'm very proud of the foster homes.

This bill says: If all the parties are open, why can't that child go into an open adoption, where the birth parents may be informed regularly as to the progress of their child and photographs and letters exchanged? This will provide an opportunity for far more children to move on to permanency. This bill will also recognize that adoption by individuals who are not a part of the extended family is certainly an option that happens all the time. But often there are extended families who say, "We would like to provide permanency for the child, but we can't financially afford it." A lot of kids don't come into care on their own; they come with their siblings. We recognize the cost that is entailed in providing necessities for a family of three or four. The ministry is pursuing a route that says, "Rather than paying for these four children to be in foster care until they turn 18, we can provide some financial support to enable the extended family to look after these children."

There are also children who are in foster care who have perhaps been in a foster home for five, six, seven or eight years and, folks, that's now their family and that's their home. This bill will allow a judge to grant an order that says that these children remain in that home; it's kind of foster guardianship. You'll be able to say to the children, "This is your home. There's not a chance that the phone will ring and you're going to be moved to another foster home."

Many foster parents want to foster for a period of time, but not, perhaps, for 15 years, because fostering does have an impact on your natural family, and all of the kids that come into care have needs not of their making.

If you've been sexually abused since you were two years old, or you've been physically beaten or you've been starved, that has shaped that child's fabric for the rest of their life. I'm increasingly stunned and amazed at foster children we have worked with who recall that something happened to them when they were eight months or nine months. I used to think that no one would remember that, but they remember that something traumatic happened. They're very high-needs, and thank goodness we have the foster homes that will work with them. But some foster homes need relief from time to time. Many will take foster children, saying, "We will be delighted to provide care until an adoptive home is found." But there reaches a point in time where that becomes a home. Sometimes, with the backlog in court cases, we're familiar with children who have waited for the court process for three or four years, and they've put down roots. This bill, again, allows some permanency to be established with the foster parents, which will again speed up the process for that child.

When we first started fostering, kids came to us with all of their possessions in green garbage bags. Try to picture that everything you own is in a green garbage bag. That's your suitcase. Well, that doesn't happen any more, but they still may have to live for years almost out of a suitcase, knowing they'll be moved, they'll go on.

This bill, if it does nothing else, will speed up the process for children going through a traumatic time; it will give them some stability, some long-term life commitments. This bill is a superb bill that I could not endorse more. It will make life better for hundreds of children in this province. It is overdue, and I applaud the minister for this bill.

1950

Mr. Leal: It's a pleasure for me to spend a few minutes this evening talking about Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

First of all, I want to start off this evening by saying that today is my daughter Shanae's birthday. She's six years old today, and she's probably just completed her hockey game. Her brother Braden was there, and my wife, Karan. They're all at the Evinrude Centre tonight to watch her play hockey. I know from experience that she's pretty good in the corner.

Mr. Kormos: Where's her father?

Mr. Leal: The member from Niagara Centre wanted to know where her father is, but I want to say that my colleague for Brampton Centre allowed me to take off on Monday evening so I could be with my kids for Halloween, and we had a great evening.

No one brings more passion to this issue than my colleague the member for Prince Edward-Hastings. The member for Prince Edward-Hastings has long experience in the Belleville area. He was chair of the school board down there, and I also believe he was chair of the children's aid society for that area for many years. He has that depth of experience, and when he speaks on a bill such as Bill 210, he comes from experience and passion

and knows what we have to do to address some of our difficulties with children in our communities.

I also want to compliment the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The minister, of course, in 2003, left the corporate world. She was then the vice-president of Scotiabank and left that world because she wanted to make a contribution to the province of Ontario. I can think of no better portfolio than the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to make that contribution, because she's always had a great passion for children, and during her corporate career at Scotiabank, she was involved in corporate programs reaching out to children in our communities right across Canada. She deserves some credit for that.

I'm particularly happy with the provisions for aboriginal people. I want to speak about two communities in my riding of Peterborough. Chief Keith Knott is the chief of the First Nations community at Curve Lake in the riding of Peterborough, and Chief Greg Cowie is the chief for Hiawatha.

During my last term on Peterborough city council from 2000 to 2003, I had the opportunity to be the council's representative on the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society. At that time, it was under the directorship of one Bob Penny. Bob retired and was succeeded by Hugh Nicholson. One of the things that I discovered during my time on the children's aid society board, and reviewing a number of cases there, was the very high proportion of First Nations children who find themselves in the children's aid society system. Often, those First Nations children are removed from their communities and are put into families that certainly don't appreciate the heritage of those First Nations communities.

Section 44, I believe, goes a long way toward starting to bridge that gap and to address that concern for the First Nations communities. I believe we have an obligation as a government to reach out to those individuals of the First Nations community, and I think that bill starts that process in a very positive and enlightened way.

Some of the other key points that are raised here in this bill: First, it will make adoption more flexible by allowing more children to be adopted while still maintaining ties to the birth family and community; second, it will make it easier for relatives, including grandparents, to provide permanent homes for those children and youth who are in need; third, it will create more legal options beyond traditional adoption, so children and youth in care can be placed in a permanent home; and fourth, it will help resolve more cases outside the courtroom through mediation, a more collaborative, speedy and less costly approach.

I think that's a very important aspect of this bill: that we're going to go toward mediation. Often, when you get into the courtroom setting, it's very adversarial, indeed, and very expensive. Any time we have the opportunity to go to mediation, to bring parties together and have a more meaningful, more positive dialogue outside of the tense confines that we often find within the courtroom, I think it's a very positive process indeed.

The other key thing is that we're going to change the way children's aid societies do business in Ontario. We'll make them more stable and sustainable. When you look at children's aid societies, perpetually they've been running deficits in Ontario. I think this bill, through some of the provisions, will go a long way toward making them much more stable and sustainable. For those children's aid societies, that's a very important approach, not only for the hard-working staff who are employed by children's aid societies in Ontario, but certainly for the stability for the children whom they serve.

Interjection.

Mr. Leah: My good friend from Perth-Middlesex says focusing in on kids is very important because they're the great resource of the future and the leaders for tomorrow.

Another point with regards to children's aid societies: We're going to provide a new funding framework and put greater emphasis, as I said, on adoption and other family-based care options. We're proposing new options so societies can better match their level of response to each child's needs, and what can be better than that? As I previously chatted about, we're talking about bringing in mediation to get out of the situation of court-based settlements.

We're bringing in a series of new rules. It's an opportunity to overhaul how we deal with children in the province of Ontario. It's a hallmark of this government, which is very progressive in nature, looking at previous things that need to be overhauled. I think this bill is a good example of that.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): And we have our new ministry.

Mr. Leah: We have our new ministry, just two years ago, and I want to compliment the minister. She happened to be in Peterborough some months ago and took the opportunity to meet with a number of stakeholder groups in my riding. It was an opportunity to talk with those individuals who have such crucial roles in raising children and providing for children in our community.

We've been working very closely with the Adoption Council of Ontario to strengthen the adoption matching base here in Ontario, to help workers and children's aid societies to match available children with prospective parents. I think that's a very positive step forward.

There's nothing more important in our communities across Ontario than finding permanent homes for children. I think this bill goes a long way, and that's what's best. It's best for our children to have those permanent homes, and Bill 210 goes a long way to bring about permanency and sustainability for families. Instead of having children that fit the rules, we're going to have rules that fit the children. I think that's a very important philosophical underpinning of this bill, and something that we want to pursue.

2000

It appears that my colleagues in the opposition—it looks like there's going to be unanimity on this bill. It's one of those bills I think you can't have a lot of disagreement with. You may want to do a bit of fine-tuning,

a bit of tweaking, but I don't see any substantive arguments against the general thrust and the philosophical base of this bill. I assume it will be going to committee. We look forward to an opportunity to take it across the province and hear how people are going to endorse the many provisions of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I want to remind folks once again that in approximately 28 minutes' time, Shelley Martel, the member for Nickel Belt, is going to rise and speak on behalf of New Democrats with respect to Bill 210. I know that folks know Shelley for her many years of experience here in the provincial Legislature. She's got 18 years and is still running strong. She's one of the most effective members of this Legislature that Queen's Park has ever witnessed. The people in Nickel Belt, who insist on returning her election after election, know that one is hard-pressed to find a harder-working MPP anywhere in the province.

She's also a mother, and that's an incredibly difficult job as well, but Shelley Martel, with some occasional assistance from her husband, when he's home, does an incredible job. She has two great kids, Sarah and Jonathan, who are no strangers to Queen's Park. I just don't know where Shelley finds the energy to work with two delightful but energetic kids and to perform incredibly demanding duties as an MPP as well.

I'm looking forward to Ms. Martel. She has been working on children's issues for a long time. She has served well her leadership in the campaign to ensure that children with autism are treated justly and fairly by this government. That the discrimination by the McGuinty Liberals against children with autism is taken on and challenged has been one of Ms. Martel's biggest struggles, and whether it was working with their parents or taking on this government, she's something to look forward to in the next 28 minutes.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It's my pleasure to speak for approximately two minutes on Bill 210. As I mentioned yesterday when I spoke to this bill, the problem this bill attempts to address is the potential for adopting some 18,000 children who are in the care of foster parents, usually through children's aid. Of those, there are about 9,000 children who are in fact under permanent crown wardship of the province of Ontario. Of those 9,000 children, 75% have access terms so that their parents can visit with them under certain terms as laid down by a judge's order and, up to now, they have been totally ineligible for adoption. This is something this bill attempts to address, and since the children in question really have no right to speak for themselves, it is up to us lawgivers to protect the rights of these children. But I think we all stand under the same belief and intention of attempting to have these children end up in a safe and caring environment.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the two statements that were made, I just want to focus for a bit on the alternative dispute resolution mechanism, because it is true that the current Child and Family

Services Act does not address ADR as an option. There are no mechanisms to allow for disputes to be settled through that mechanism, so you end up in a court proceeding to resolve the matter. In the minister's own background paper that was produced as a briefing for my colleague, it says, "This can lead to costly and protracted litigation and may delay achieving a permanent plan for the child."

The first question I have is, why is it that the court system is so backlogged that this becomes a problem? We might take some of these cases, then, out of court system. I doubt that's going to resolve some of the really serious issues in the court system that we should be addressing.

My second concern is that the ADR mechanisms that are going to be employed, we assume as a result of this bill, don't become very litigious as well. It's very clear in the briefing material that the office of the child's lawyer may act as the child's legal representative. I'm not opposed to that. That's probably very necessary. The dilemma that I see occurring, however, is the potential for the alternative dispute resolution mechanism to become as litigious, expensive, complicated and potentially as confrontational as any court proceeding that may have occurred already to try and deal with matters under the Child and Family Services Act.

I say to the government, if you're going to move to ADR as a way to resolve some of these disputes, then you want to be awfully careful and awfully certain that you're not setting up a parallel process that could be essentially as expensive, because the CAS could have their lawyer there, the children's lawyer could be there, and you may have a biological parent who is trying to intervene in the proceedings and have a lawyer there as well. So you've got all these legal expenses that you would have had in court already, and it may be just as confrontational. So some really serious care and careful consideration is going to have to be employed to determine how that process is actually going to work, if it's going to work better than a court process.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I think, quite simply stated, this is a good bill. There's no question about it. This is about the children. This is about making sure that children aren't penalized because of their family situations.

Having raised five children of my own, I know one thing about kids: I may not have raised them all right, I may have had some bumps in the road, but I love my children and I made sure they had permanence, that they had a connection with their family, not just with their own brothers and sisters but with their extended families. With this bill, we allow grandparents and extended family to raise these children.

Every family has a heritage and a culture all its own. Earlier this week we debated the adoption disclosure bill, and we talked about how important it was for children to have their roots, to be connected, to have somewhere they can call home, to know where they belong. It should be the same here. These children have a right to know

and they have a right to be a part of their extended family. Sometimes things happen in individual families and it shouldn't reflect on the entire, extended, larger family group. Those children should be able to have that experience, to be part of it. Children need permanence. It's very important. They may not like the rules, they may wonder why they're being asked to do certain things, but they understand that it's because they are loved, and that comes very often from family.

I know myself, if I knew that I had a family member, not necessarily one of my own children but someone else, a family member who was taken out of the family situation because of something that had happened, I'd want to take care of that child. I'd want to have the right to do that, to be able to keep them within their larger family unit so they could grow up and enjoy and know who they really are.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Peterborough, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Leal: I want to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Niagara Centre, Cambridge and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for providing comments on Bill 210. I think, when you listened very carefully to the comments, you could see some unanimity that's starting to form on this bill.

This bill, I believe, complements some of the other things that this government is doing; for example, the Best Start program. When you talk about permanency for a child in a situation and then you move that child into the Best Start program and then into elementary school, where we cap classes from JK to grade 3, it's about giving that child the best possible start, the best possible beginning in the province of Ontario, and that's exactly what we're doing here.

2010

As I said, this bill will go to committee. There will be some tweaking, some fine-tuning. But listen to the speakers tonight. There is a unanimity I can see forming—

Interjection: A growing consensus.

Mr. Leal: —a growing consensus. They see the philosophical thrust behind this bill. You can see us, as we should from time to time, as legislators, all coming together for the children in this province, and I am pleased. I'll listen to others this evening, but it's all for the kids. We're coming together in the best interests of kids in the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: Someone said that there is a rural part of my riding. I say to the member from Niagara Centre that about 40% of it is, and I have a very good relationship with that part of the riding.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: There's some heckling here, Mr. Speaker, but I'll continue on.

I think this is a very good bill. The minister deserves a great deal of credit for bringing it forward. I look forward to its speedy passage.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I am very pleased to have this opportunity tonight, at about 10 after

8, to be speaking to second reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

I am very pleased that the Minister of Children and Youth Services is showing her respect and regard for this place by being present throughout the debate, and she deserves credit and acknowledgment for that. I think it's appreciated by all members that she's showing interest in this debate by personally being here, and I would hope that all ministers of the crown would take note of her interest in her bill. This bill, of course, was introduced by her predecessor, the member for Hamilton Mountain, who served as Minister of Children and Youth Services for approximately the first two years of the current government. The bill was introduced in this House on June 6 before the summer recess, and it was designated for carry-over after the House was prorogued so that the government could continue to move this issue forward.

I had a chance to review some of the comments that were made by the minister of children's services of the day when she introduced this bill in this House, again, back in June. She talked about the need for legislation of this type. She referred to it as an historic step forward "on behalf of the thousands of children and youth in Ontario who are in the permanent care of a children's aid society."

She suggested that the current system of adoption and children's aid society rules is "too rigid." She said that "we need to help more children find a permanent, caring home by making adoption more flexible for individual children and friendlier"—and easier—"for parents." She talked about the legislation as being an effort to "modernize the rules around adoption" so that they would work more effectively for children and families, and she indicated that the proposed changes in Bill 210 would have the effect of removing what she called "the rigid restriction that a child must completely sever all ties to his or her birth family before being eligible for adoption."

She indicated to the House at that time that approximately "70% of children in permanent care" currently "can't be adopted because their birth family has a court-ordered right to contact them. When judges make an order that a child become a ward of the state, they may be hesitant to seal off all contact with the family, except in those cases where it's necessary for the child's safety." She said that the proposed changes in this legislation, Bill 210, "would mean that a child could keep those important ties to their family, community and culture and still be adopted or placed in a permanent home."

She also made reference to the fact that an adoption "will help a number of these children find a secure, stable family," but she said that adoption was not always right for every single child: "Right now, if a child can't be adopted, they often have no choice but foster or group care." Instead of making the child fit the rules, she indicated that the government was making an effort to change the rules to fit the child.

She talked about the fact that these proposed changes would give children's aid societies more flexibility to

meet the needs of each individual child. For some children, she indicated that "it would mean being placed with a member of their extended family, someone they already know and trust. It may be a grandparent...." In some cases, they would be "placed with another adult, possibly a member of their community," or perhaps even a long-time foster parent.

She indicated, "The young person could have the legal and emotional certainty of a permanent home and family, at least until they turn 18," under these proposed rules, and that "The proposed changes are part of our government's plan to help more children and youth in care of children's aid societies thrive in a safe, stable, supportive home."

She also talked about the fact that in many cases today, parents who have tried to adopt a child from a children's aid society have expressed to the government, I guess, that the process is "cumbersome" and "inconsistent." So the government is making, apparently, an effort to standardize these adoption rules across the province so that they are the same no matter whether you live in Timmins or Toronto or perhaps in Fergus. Apparently, it would ensure that there would be the same process for private adoptions as someone going through a children's aid society.

The minister also alluded to the fact that the government is making an effort to work with the Adoption Council of Ontario and children's aid societies across the province to develop a province-wide Web site that would help children's aid societies match children who are available for adoption with would-be parents, people who want to adopt a child, and that for those families that need it, there would be some post-adoption support so that families who adopt a child from a children's aid society aren't suddenly left on their own.

She also made reference to the fact that there are three significant changes to the way children's aid societies do business that are inherent in this bill.

First of all, she's talking about establishing a new funding framework that puts a greater emphasis on the specific results that the government wants to see for children, like adoption. I gather that means financial incentives to children's aid societies so that more children are adopted and that that desired outcome is in fact realized.

She talked about the fact that children's aid societies, if this bill is passed in its current form, would have more options available to them when they respond to new cases and about ensuring that the adoption process always starts with a rigorous safety assessment, and after that, the societies being able to match their level of response to the needs of the individual child.

She indicated, lastly, that the legislation proposes more extensive use of mediation instead of courts in child protection matters. She said she felt that mediation is, generally speaking, a less adversarial process than using the courts and, in that sense, in the interests of the child and the family.

All of these ideas that the minister expressed to the House on June 6 I think would enjoy some degree of

support from the members of the House, at least in terms of broad principles. They seem to be reasonable ideas that are being brought forward by the government to work to address a problem that I think the member for Cambridge has quite rightly identified, essentially the fact that currently in the province of Ontario there are between 18,000 and 19,000 kids in care—foster care, I guess, in most cases; that of these 18,000 to 19,000 children, approximately 9,000 are considered to be permanent crown wards of the province; and that 75% of this group of 9,000 kids have access orders of some sort in which natural parents have some access rights to visit or interact with their children but of course don't have custody of their children over the medium term, as the kids are in foster care. Currently, these children are not eligible for adoption. This is, I guess, the fundamental issue that the government is hoping to address with this particular piece of legislation.

The Liberal government of Ontario today likes to talk about the fact that they are the first government to appoint a Minister of Children and Youth Services and that that's something they have done to demonstrate their interest in our young people. Again going back to first principles, I think every member of this House would agree that protecting children must be a very high priority, an important priority, of any provincial government of any political stripe.

But I would remind the members of the government side, in some cases members who were perhaps first elected in 2003, that our colleague the former member from Mississauga South, Margaret Marland, who served in this House from 1985 to 2003 and served with a great deal of distinction, was actually, in my opinion, the first minister responsible for children who was appointed by any government. She served from October 1997, if I'm not mistaken, until the spring of 2001. So she served for almost four years as a minister responsible for children, and I think she did a magnificent job in that particular responsibility. I think it underlined and demonstrated the support that our government had for ensuring that children's needs were going to be met. She became a very effective advocate for children. So I'll just put that forward to remind the members on the government side that in fact it was an idea that the former government was obviously prepared to embrace, and that is something that I think they would probably want to at some point acknowledge during the course of this debate.

2020

It's been encouraging to hear from the government members in particular, and I think the minister has indicated that she feels this bill should go to committee and that there will be considerable debate at committee, and public hearings as well, amongst knowledgeable people who are experts in this field. Any one of us who reads this bill through, as I think most of us will want to do—and even if you read the explanatory notes, which are long and complex—certainly wants to make sure we get this right. One of the former speakers tonight talked about giving this bill swift passage. I'm not sure that

would be something I would support. I think there's a need for considerable debate and discussion at probably the standing committee on social policy so we make sure that we get this right.

This is the kind of bill, in fact, that perhaps should have been referred to committee after first reading. This is one of those bills that comes forward and is embraced by all sides of the House, at least in principle, but at the same time is so important and so vital, and really isn't political in the sense of some of the issues that divide us, government and opposition. I think we all support the broad goals. In the past, we've had good success with these kind of bills in referring them to standing committees of this Legislature after first reading. So before the government has taken a hard and fast position on some of the issues, before the minister commits her personal credibility to the bill, the bill being referred to a committee after first reading allows for, I think, a more open-ended debate on the issues without the government having to perhaps face the embarrassment of having to make a significant change in the bill. Again, this is a bill that might have been better sent to committee after first reading. That obviously was not done, but now we have the opportunity to go to committee after second reading.

I would suggest and hope that there would be extensive hearings, not just in Toronto but across the province, because there are differences. Obviously, various areas of the province have different needs and different circumstances and different kinds of challenges, and if we just have a couple of afternoons of hearings here in Toronto while the House is sitting from 3:30 to 6 o'clock and we just allow perhaps the provincial associations to come in because there isn't time for others, I think that would be a mistake and we would be remiss in doing that.

I would hope that this bill can go through a process where there are extensive hearings. I would love to see the standing committee on social policy travel the province and come to the cities of Kitchener-Waterloo and Guelph, our area, because I think we have a great deal of expertise in our area which could be very helpful to the government in terms how we move forward with this bill.

Over the 15 years that I've been privileged to serve in this House, I've had a chance to work with Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County. I see the member for Guelph-Wellington nodding her head, and I think she would agree with me that they do an excellent job. Moe Brubacher, who is the executive director of Family and Children's Services of Guelph and Wellington County, is someone with a great deal of experience. He's been managing that agency for longer than I've been here in this House, if I'm not mistaken. He's come to see me over the years, whether I was sitting in opposition or government, usually on an annual basis, sometimes more often than that, to talk primarily about the challenges that the agency's facing related to government policy, but also about funding issues. I've always tried to be an advocate for that important group in our area, which does such good work. It's not just the

staff who work for the children's aid societies; in many cases it's the foster parents and volunteers who put a great deal of work into improving the lives of these children.

Since I've been privileged to serve part of Waterloo region in my riding of Waterloo-Wellington for the last six years, I've had the opportunity to interact with Waterloo Family and Children's Services and to work closely with the executive director of that particular agency, Peter Ringrose. I know my colleague the member for Cambridge has already talked about the excellent working relationship that we have with Peter Ringrose and his staff.

I think we have a great deal of expertise to offer on this issue and would hope that can be accessed.

The other point I would want to make, in conclusion, is that I know that the children's aid societies in the province have a deficit, collectively, of about \$70 million. This point has been brought up on a number occasions. I believe the children's aid societies are effectively managed in a financial sense. I also know there are extraordinary challenges being put on the caseworkers to ensure that they adhere to new provincial guidelines, and that has caused an enormous amount of stress on those agencies. I think the government, over the medium and long term, needs to deal with the financial challenge that our children's aid societies are facing. Obviously, we wouldn't want to allow this to continue, where children's aid societies have an overwhelming deficit of about \$70 million. We wouldn't want to turn a blind eye to that, because it would mean that over the long run, care for children who are in need of it would be diminished.

This is a funding issue that I would hope the government will address in the coming budget. We heard the government's fall economic statement yesterday. I have it in my office. I had a busy day today and I haven't had a chance, as I had wanted to, to go through the documents, but I don't think there was a commitment for expanded funding to children's aid societies, if I'm not mistaken. I'm sure if I am, one of the government members will correct me very quickly. That was an opportunity for the government to express support for children's aid societies in terms of their financial challenge—a \$70-million deficit. It was a chance, an opportunity that was missed. Of course, there is another opportunity and there will be another provincial budget in the spring, and I would anticipate and expect that all of us in the Legislature will have a chance to hear from our children's aid societies in the next little while, if there's an effort made to bring these issues to our attention. Hopefully, collectively, we can advocate on behalf of those children's aid societies that represent our communities so well, with a view toward ensuring that the Minister of Finance makes a commitment in the upcoming budget next spring to deal with this issue in a meaningful way such that care is not diminished for children in our communities.

Thank you very much for listening to me. I look forward to the continued debate on this particular issue. I think it's an important one. I hope the ideas that I've

expressed to the House this evening have been helpful. Again, I would reiterate the need for further discussion and debate on this issue because of the importance of it and the concern I have that we need to do all we can to protect children. We need to get this right. We need to ensure that the government has a plan to deal with these matters in the coming years so that our children are protected.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: With respect to the comments that were made by the member for Waterloo–Wellington, I want to focus on his comments with respect to the need for the public hearings to be outside of this place when they actually do take place. I am reminded that another member in previous debates said he looked forward to speedy passage, but I can tell you, I don't think that's going to happen. We wouldn't want to see it happen that way and, frankly, I think the community out there, which has a very important interest in how this legislation unfolds, would not want that to happen without some opportunity for children's aid societies, for grandparent groups, for those who are involved in the system and for native organizations in particular to have some kind of say.

We say to the government that it's regrettable—because the bill was introduced on June 6—that some provision was not made at that time for the bill to go out, even after first reading. It is too bad that the bill didn't go out, even after first reading, for public hearings, during the course of the summer, because then those extensive consultations outside of here and around the province could have occurred at that time. I say to the government that didn't happen, but it does have to happen now. We are starting to hear from aboriginal organizations in particular who really want to make sure this works. There has always been a conflict as to how some of these issues are arrived at in terms of child protection, where kids end up, how they end up very far from their home in very inappropriate placements, and aboriginal communities in particular deserve to be involved in this process, particularly around issues of placement of children with extended families, how that will occur, and how access will continue to be provided where it is decided that extended family, for whatever reason, are not going to be appropriate adoptive parents. I encourage the government to indicate very early on that there will be hearings and that those will take place both in Toronto and outside of Toronto to ensure that people can have their say.

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Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I too wanted to make a few comments with respect to this bill and to say, first of all, that I think this kind of bill is long overdue. I think the comments that were made earlier, not only by the member who just spoke, in the last 20-minute segment, but also the members who spoke before, like the member from Peterborough and particularly the member from Hastings–Prince Edward, who has been involved with the children's aid society and with fostering children for over 25 years and can certainly relate from personal experi-

ence a number of the experiences that he had as a result of looking after children and adopting some children as well, and the tremendous, traumatic effects that it can have on children who are fostered with a number of different families over a long period of time.

It also gives me an opportunity just to very briefly say something about children's aid societies—I know that's what the member from Guelph–Wellington mentioned as well—and that is the hard work that's being done by children's aid society workers on a day-to-day basis. I think what people outside understand is that this is a mandated service. Quite often, the children's aid society has to go into situations in order to protect children. That's what they're mainly involved in. But quite frequently they do so without, necessarily, the consent of the parents, other guardians or indeed a lot of people who may be involved with the particular child. Whereas a lot of children's mental health services are sought out by the individuals or by their parents, the services of the children's aid society are mandated services, and that makes it even harder on the people who are trying to do this work on behalf of all of us to protect children on a day-to-day basis.

I applaud them for all of the hard work they've done over the years, and, undoubtedly, once this law comes into effect, they will continue to do so.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I just want to congratulate my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington for doing a very conscientious job during his 20 minutes, trying to explain this bill and also indicating—and I also share his belief—that this needs to go to committee. I'm not sure what the bill is doing exactly. In fact, I commend anyone who can speak for 20 minutes on this bill.

As I understand it, there are 9,000 children in the permanent care of the children's aid society who, because they have court orders of access for their birth parents, are unable under current law to be adopted. Well, if you change that law, are you really going to increase the percentage of these children who can get adopted in a significant way? You're adopting a child, but then the birth parents—who may not be the best parents in the world or the child probably wouldn't be in care in the first place, by definition—are going to be able to pop in; the drunk mum or the drug-addicted father is going to be able to pop in anytime and have automatic access, and you go to all the bother and care and love of adopting these children?

I would love this to go to committee and have people who have experience in this field, from other jurisdictions perhaps, come forward and tell us how this is all going to work. It seems to me it would be better to tighten up on the access, permanently remove these children from the terrible lives they've had, and give them the best care and the best parents possible, without those parents having to look over their shoulders all the time for the addicted mother or the drunk father showing up at the doorstep and demanding—and having a law protecting—that access. Call me crazy, but—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: OK.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing over there laughs because he probably knows I am crazy from time to time. But the fact of the matter is, this bill is a real tongue-twister and I would agree that it needs to go to committee. Again, I commend my colleagues and anyone who can speak for 20 minutes on it.

Mr. Kormos: It is always a pleasure to hear the participation of Ted Arnott, the member for Waterloo-Wellington. I listened carefully to his comments on Bill 210.

I would caution government members to please suppress some of their sometimes—I was going to say “mindless”; I won’t—less-than-thoughtful enthusiasm for this type of legislation. There are some serious and legitimate caveats being raised.

The issue of committee hearings—look, at the end of the day, it’s going to be the government that determines how long and how wide and far this bill goes to committee, but restrict those at your own risk.

The two aspects of the bill that I want to speak to are the aspect of alternative dispute resolution—because I think there are some serious pitfalls in dealing with matters by way of dispute resolution when, in fact, if we’re really interested in the best interests of the child prevailing, decisions about that child’s future, about that child’s well-being, in my view should not be the result of necessarily a mediated process, but should be the result of court oversight. If there’s a shortage of courtrooms and judges, address that.

The other issue is the open adoption. Look, Tim Hudak and I are well aware of the origins of these proposals. Sheila Volchert, for whom I have the highest regard and about whom I am going to speak when my opportunity comes, was meeting with Brenda Elliott, the Conservative Minister of Community and Social Services, advocating on behalf of grandparents raising children, open adoptions, adoptions within the family structure, because the concern about a natural parent continuing to have access to a child who’s adopted by adoptive parents could well deter adoptions by non-family members, and that should be of interest to government members.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Waterloo-Wellington, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arnott: Just to reply briefly, I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for her contribution in response to my speech, and I know that she’ll make a very important speech next on behalf of the New Democrats. She has served as the critic for children and youth services, I know, for a number of years and has done an effective job in bringing these issues forward. Certainly the issue of services for autistic children is something that she has highlighted repeatedly in this House. It is indicative, unfortunately, of a broken Liberal promise to ensure that services for children with autism, the IBI therapies—intensive behavioural intervention—would be available to those children after the age of six, something that Dalton McGuinty promised to do in the election campaign but unfortunately, to date, so far has not done.

I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for his comments. I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that you would not have ruled him out of order if he had stood up and indicated that he was going to expand the funding for the communities of Mapleton and Centre Wellington in response to our tornado disaster. Had he done that, I certainly would have applauded him for responding in that way. I’m looking forward to continuing to work with him on that particular issue.

I want to thank the member for Simcoe-Grey, who spoke very briefly and complimented, I think, all members of the House who have participated in this debate so far, because it is a complex issue. Quite frankly, I found out I was going to be speaking to this bill this afternoon. I’ve had an opportunity to review some of the information, but I would have wished to have more time to consult with my constituents before I had the opportunity to speak to second reading on this issue. Again, that underlines to me the need for extensive hearings on this issue.

I want to thank the member for Niagara Centre, who has responded in an interesting way to the comments that have been made this evening. I think he’s going to be speaking to this bill later on, but perhaps not tonight. So we look forward to that too.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It’s a pleasure for me to participate in the debate tonight. I want to begin by saying that I found an opportunity to get some information from our own children’s aid society, which I think I have a very good relationship with, after a long period of time. I talked this afternoon very briefly to the assistant executive director, Norah Dougan, who also gave me some information from the director of finance and the adoption supervisor with respect to the bill. I want to raise some of the cautions, the flags, the concerns that come from our own children’s aid society with respect to the legislation that is before us.

The first has to do with the opportunity in the bill to place children with extended family or community. The change that the government is proposing is as follows: Right now, there is no legislative requirement for children’s aid societies to consider extended family or community members as a potential alternate placement for a child early in a case when a child cannot be returned to his or her family, and the hearing must be adjourned. In many cases, the child remains in the temporary care of CAS. The legislation, if passed, is going to broaden the definition of “place of safety” to allow CAS to place the child with his or her relative or a member of the community following apprehension, subject to an assessment that will show whether or not this is a safe environment. Secondly, the court will be required to consider if it’s in the child’s best interests to be placed in the care of a relative or a member of the child’s extended family or community before actually placing the child in the temporary care of CAS.

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The concern that our CAS wants to raise, and I want to raise it here, is that we’d better be awful sure of the

criteria that we develop about a safe place and the criteria that are going to be met for children to go into the care of another extended family member and not into the care of the CAS, because you don't want to get into the terrible situation that we saw expressed in the media here in the last couple of weeks. There is an inquest going on right now with horrible circumstances involving extended family. So yes, yes, yes, in many circumstances that is the most appropriate placement, and we hope the mechanisms would be in place for that to happen, but it is not always the most appropriate placement. So the criteria that are developed around an assessment, which would normally go on now before anyone becomes a foster parent anyway, but the further need to make sure that the criteria around placement are well-developed, are effective, and that we are not putting that child at further risk in terms of the end result of the placement.

One of the concerns that has been raised, because our children's aid society works quite extensively with a number of First Nations on Manitoulin Island, is that there really has to be serious consideration given to placement of First Nations children. Under the guise of customary care, far too many of our First Nations children off the island, and frankly out of other aboriginal communities, are placed in group homes far away from their aboriginal community, in placements that are entirely inappropriate from a social point of view, from an emotional point of view and from a cultural point of view, completely inappropriate placements, all under the guise of what we call customary care.

The societies themselves, with great consultation from First Nations communities, are going to have to be very clear about what are the definitions of "customary care" and how that is going to be implemented to ensure that there is accountability when that care arrangement goes into effect and, frankly, to ensure that there's no abuse in the process. Our children's aid society would say, and they would say it, I think, with the support of a number of First Nations, that there has been abuse in that process, that we've seen far too many First Nations children who are not only taken from their biological parent or parents in an aboriginal community, but are taken out of that community altogether and placed in a group home far from home, and that is the end of their relationship with their First Nation community. It may very well sever a lot of the attempts that they have as aboriginal children to adhere to their own traditions, to their own cultures and values. Those changes that we make really do require very significant work with aboriginal communities. A lot of the problem is that those issues have not been sorted out.

I know my own children's aid society has talked to me about this issue before. It's talked to me about this issue for a number of years, that there is no clarification, that there is no direction, that there is very little assistance from the ministry in dealing with these specific issues, this relationship between aboriginal First Nations communities and children's aid societies that are not aboriginal children's aid societies. We really need a heck of a

lot more clarification and work to be done to ensure that those arrangements are appropriate, proper, and culturally appropriate as well.

Secondly, with respect to support services: If I read the bill, it makes it clear that the CAS, if the legislation is passed, is going to be able to provide financial assistance where a crown ward order is terminated and that child is placed in a person's custody, if the child meets the eligibility criteria. Right now, extended care and maintenance under the guise of financial assistance is not available to youth when the crown wardship order is terminated prior to reaching age 18. I take from that that the government is going to continue to provide financial assistance around care and maintenance—a clothing allowance, support around accommodation, food etc.—which would be particularly important. We get instances of a number of grandparents who want to adopt, but they're on a fixed income. They come to our office and say, "We just can't afford to do this. We think this is the best placement, but this child is going to have ongoing financial needs that we are not going to be able to meet." There is really no place for them to go at this point in time to get the kind of financial assistance that would allow them to retain their grandson or granddaughter.

It is a serious shame in this province that we have grandparents who have had to see their grandchildren go back into the care of the CAS because they couldn't afford to care for them themselves and there was no mechanism to pay for that care. If they were a foster parent, they would get that money, but because they are not—they are the grandparent and they perhaps wanted to adopt—there was no way for them to get the financial assistance to do so.

I'm assuming what it means is that in those scenarios, grandparents actually adopting, there is going to be financial assistance. What I don't think it means, and this is what the society raised with me today, is financial support from any of those services that any number of children require as a result of the very difficult childhood they might have had before they end up in a foster home and before, under this legislation, they end up in an adoptive home. I'm referring to children's mental health services, developmental health services, respite services, limited residential services etc. Frankly, the ability of this approach of more open adoption to actually work hinges very clearly on the ability of many of these adoptive parents to still be able to access these types of services for their newly adopted children.

As I understand it, if you're in foster care now, many of those services are both arranged for by the children's aid society and paid for by the children's aid society out of their global budget, out of their children's budget. If and when you have an adoption occur and that money doesn't flow for that service—(a) if there's no coordination of that service through the CAS any more, but (b) far more importantly, if there is no financial assistance from somebody to pay for those important services—that is really going to come into play when parents are making a decision about adoption. Some of

these services are really expensive. Many of these children are going to be in for quite a number of years needing to access these services because of things that happened to them in their biological home before they were taken into care. I don't see anything in this legislation, and I didn't hear the minister say anything, about what the government's commitment is, what the government is in for in terms of ensuring that the government is going to continue to pay for these necessary services, be they children's mental health, respite services, short-term residential placements etc.

It's one thing, and I agree it's important, to be providing maintenance—i.e., support around clothing allowance, food, shelter etc.—but it's a whole other matter when the child you want to adopt is undergoing and will undergo for some long time treatment through a broad range of services in the community. Someone's got to pay for that, and if adoptive parents are the ones who are going to be left in that position, I think you're going to see a rather significant decline in people's optimism or desire or willingness, I guess is the key word, to actually get into this, if they feel they're not going to be able to make the financial commitment that's going to be required.

Over and above that is the issue about whether or not some of those services are actually in the community to access right now. We've seen this through questions that we raised in the spring, where many parents of special-needs children were forced to give up the care of their children to the CAS in order to access the appropriate care that they needed; in most cases, residential care. CAS essentially was at the top of the list and was in a position to access these services for children who were coming into their care. That's fine and dandy, but if children are going out of CAS care because they are no longer crown wards, where are those children who need and perhaps were receiving services going to rank in those waiting lists?

That's a difficult issue that the government has got to address. In far too many communities the services are not in place. They are not in place despite everything the government had to say about how they were going to return all of these special-needs children back to their parents, and how all of these temporary care arrangements that parents were forced into in order to get residential care were going to be extinguished, because these kids were going to get care. But we know through the estimates process, because there were parents who came to the estimates process of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, that many of those arrangements have not been put in place. Many of those kids are still sitting in residential care because there aren't the services in the community.

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So if you've got these children where there are parents who want to adopt them, where are they going to rank in terms of actually getting some of those services? There's a huge problem now, and in many communities this issue is going to have to be sorted out or, again, there will be

parents who might want to adopt who will say, "(a) We've got no guarantee that we can pay for the service, and (b) we've got no guarantee we're going to get the service in the first place. We'd be better to continue as foster parents, because that way we might be at the top of the list for a service and we might have the payment for the services to continue to be made by the ministry."

The government has to grapple with those two very important issues about post-adoption support services, or their hope around seeing large numbers of children being adopted may very well vanish in the face of that reality that adoptive parents are going to face.

Let me deal with the proposal to use mediation. Our own children's aid society made the point, and it's a point that I have to make, that because of the court backlog right now the proceeding to ensure permanency for a child is a very difficult one. So they said the "alternative dispute resolution" mechanism "will allow the parties to resolve issues outside of the courts. As the court process is presently very slow the intent would be that alternative dispute resolution will allow the process of ensuring permanency for a child to occur more quickly. This will be a welcome change." But they also said that any mechanism has to be adequately funded and it has to be separate from a CAS budget to ensure both objectivity and neutrality in terms of resolutions that will be dealt with.

My colleague from Niagara has raised this concern, and so have I, that if the issue is a backlog in court, maybe we had better be dealing with that, because that issue about a backlog in court is affecting not only CAS but any number of other proceedings going on in court.

Secondly, my concern is that the alternative dispute resolution mechanism itself could become just as litigious, just as confrontational and perhaps just as costly and perhaps just as time-consuming as any court process. Rightly so, the minister has pointed out in her background briefing notes that the children's lawyer could be and should be there to represent a child's interests. The CAS will probably have a lawyer there dealing with their piece of the puzzle. You may have a biological parent who is there to contest whatever arrangement might be put into place, and they might have a lawyer as well. So at the end of the day, I'm not sure where the savings are and I'm not sure how we're going to ensure that this process doesn't become just as extensive, just as lengthy and perhaps just as confrontational as any process that you might have in court.

I also say with respect to that, if there are serious issues around getting that child out of care, then that should be dealt with rapidly and speedily in court. There is no excuse for having these kinds of delays around really significant, important issues about care of children and their safety and security.

So we'll wait and see what the government comes up with with respect to alternative dispute resolution, but I raise those concerns and I certainly say that that system is going to have to be appropriately and adequately funded too, so I'm not sure where the savings are going to be. It

really has to be paid for outside of a CAS budget, because they're under serious financial strain now and, secondly, you really do want to ensure, if the process is going to be an alternative dispute mechanism and not court-ordered, that there is some objectivity and neutrality to it.

Let me deal with the complaints process of children in care, because the government has put forward a proposal that I gather is going to be amended. So I want to raise a concern about this. The government has suggested in its background papers that right now complaints are filed with the local CAS and complaint resolution is dealt with through the CAS system, and that the government was going to eliminate the director's review of client complaints and clarify issues around criteria to set out the complaints procedure. Then the minister said that perhaps the government would bring forward amendments, as I understand it, that would have put the complaints process right outside the CAS. So it would be an independent third party that you would take your complaint to in order to have that adjudicated.

Let me raise this point from the perspective of our own CAS. Our own CAS was happy to see that the legislation, as currently drafted, was going to say that there could not be a director's review when an adoption had already started and was underway. In our community—I won't go through the details of the case at hand—frankly, the government put the CAS in a very difficult position with a director's review. An adoption process was underway. There was a complaint raised about other parties who wanted to do the adoption, and even though the adoption process was underway, the ministry authorized a director's review of that particular circumstance, so it of course set back the adoption process. It was very difficult for the parents who had undertaken the adoptive proceedings, whom the CAS was supporting. It was difficult for the children who were involved, because they thought they saw some permanency coming. Then there was a director's review that landed on the lap of everybody. There was much uncertainty and instability around whether the director would decide that somebody else should actually be involved in this adoption.

Our CAS was happy with the proposal that the minister brought forward to say that there will no longer be a director's review permitted when an adoption process is underway. Now the minister says we're going to have an outside complaint process—fine and dandy. I still want to know at what point there will be no review. If an adoption is underway, there has to be some clarity. Whether it's within the CAS or an independent agency looking after the complaint, there has to be some process whereby, once the adoption process has started, you can't turn that clock back, you can't stop that proceeding, you can't change that. Much work has gone into ensuring that the adoptive parents are appropriate, and you just can't arbitrarily stop that process in midstream.

So whatever complaint process the ministry comes forward with, I would encourage the ministry to come forward with some real clarity around at what point you

cannot make a complaint and it will not be investigated. I suggest that it is the point where an adoption process is already underway; a complaint should not be reviewed under that circumstance.

In the short time that's remaining, let me just raise two other points; one is financial resources. I raised this with the minister yesterday, and I want to raise it again. Under the Conservatives, there was a major change in terms of how the CAS operated. Many would argue that so much of workers' time is now spent dealing with apprehension matters and not supporting children who can be supported in the community, and certainly not on adoption.

My own executive director has told me that they virtually have no resources, no staff dealing with adoption at all in our agency, because the bulk of their staff has been involved in these protection issues and taking kids out of homes. If this process is going to work, then I need to know where the financial resources are coming from to ensure that the staff will be in place to actually deal with the adoption side of children's aid societies, because it has been under neglect in too many of the agencies so far.

The financial director of our own children's aid society tells me it has a \$1-million deficit right now, on a budget of \$28 million. If they don't get some financial resources, it's going to be very hard for them to re-allocate human resources internally to actually deal with these adoption matters. They also make it very clear that the new funding model that the government has doesn't resolve the problem at all. The new funding model makes adjustments for inflation by 3%, but the salary settlement for the CAS in these past two years has totalled 6%, so we're essentially being flatlined.

The second problem is that the new funding model doesn't give any recognition to, in big CASs where people to have travel, that it costs just that much more to run those agencies. Again, that is not covered.

So we've got a CAS that's facing a \$1-million deficit. If the government wants this proposal to work, where is the money going to come from to allow the staff resources to be in place to actually do the work on adoption, work that has not been done in our agency for a long, long time now, as the executive director has pointed out to me?

I will stop on that point and welcome comments and questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It's certainly my pleasure to rise and support Bill 210. I do want to say right at the very beginning that I had the privilege of sitting on our children's aid for a number of years. One of the things that we struggled with as a children's aid was finding the proper care at the right time. I know that moving the system forward in a manner that is fitting the needs of the child—not the child fitting into the rules applied, but allowing the child to change the rules that will best meet the needs of the child—is absolutely the right direction to go.

I just look for some clarification. There were some concerns raised by the member from Nickel Belt. Our

government recognizes that for a child truly in need of protection, whether or not the child is with a grandparent or whatever that support may be, the supports must be in place, and they may be required. This may be either through financial support or access to services. We are committed to providing the supports necessary to make those permanent options available.

I just have a bit of time left, and I want to say thank you to all the foster parents who have given so much of their time to providing the care that is needed by so many children from our children's aid services. When they give of their homes, their families and their time, it's a huge commitment. Every year, I attend the volunteer awards for our children's aid services. A lot of the families have been providing foster care for 28 years, 32 years, 35 years. It's remarkable. Thank you.

2100

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'd just like to comment in the few moments that I have on some of the key points that were raised by the member from Nickel Belt. I think all of us understand the importance of legislation that deals with this issue, that deals with children in very vulnerable situations. We recognize the fact that the minister has been very clear that this particular piece of legislation is designed to encourage adoption. But I think there are a number of potential problems in how that might work out. The member has referred to the complexities of the openness agreements, the kinds of problems that might arise and the kinds of impediments that those problems might bring in terms of encouraging people to adopt. I think, looking at that, we need to look very, very carefully at the kind of information that's provided through the public hearing process, because, frankly, this is too important an issue to be left without the benefit of expertise.

The question of alternative dispute resolution was one I raised yesterday as well as the member for Nickel Belt. Is it really going to be cost efficient? Is it really going to be something that isn't viewed as a precursor to the court system? I think there are a number of issues. The question of saving money: Obviously, the first issue is, are we doing the best for vulnerable children? I think that has to be the paramount concern. Then, from there, look at some of the these other issues.

Mr. Kormos: I'm looking forward to my opportunity to speak to the bill. I suspect it won't be until tomorrow afternoon now that I'll be able to do that. I'm going to talk about Sheila Volchert and her lobbying, her advocacy with the Ministry of Community and Social Services back in the Conservative government days of Brenda Elliott. There's no two ways about it: A whole lot of this bill addresses those very concerns and issues that Sheila Volchert, speaking on behalf of grandparents raising their grandchildren, raised on their behalf with the ministry at that time. But that's why we'd better put this in context.

I'm incredibly concerned that people are misinterpreting, for instance, the rationale for open adoption. If you listen to grandparents raising grandchildren, you'll

hear more than a few of them say that the reason they want open adoption is to be able to persuade the mother, usually, of those grandchildren to acquiesce to the adoption without the fear that by acquiescing, she will never see those children again. One of the barriers that so many of these grandparents face in pursuing adoption is a natural parent—a daughter, the mother of those grandchildren—who won't consent to the adoption, who'll constantly interfere with the grandparents' custody and care and control of the children, causing havoc and constant disruption. So this isn't some sort of fuzzy, feel-good thing of saying, "Let's all be one big, happy family, and have aunts and uncles and cousins and natural parents and adoptive parents all sitting down to Christmas dinner together." It's being promoted on the part of grandparents raising grandchildren, for very pragmatic reasons.

The ADR proposal—and I'm an advocate of ADR; I understand ADR—is an incredibly frightening proposal in the context of legislation and a regime wherein the best interests of the child should prevail. I have no interest in seeing those compromised in the course of negotiations.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Despite the topic of the bill under discussion tonight, for the first time since my baby has been born, I've decided not to make mention of him in my speech and move right ahead to the legislation that's been put forward.

Mr. Qadri: What's his name?

Mr. Milloy: His name, if I was to raise it, is John Patrick.

When we come to pieces of legislation like this, I'm reminded of when I was first elected as an MPP and I was going off to an education meeting where we were going to be discussing a whole range of issues—administrative issues, governance issues and budget issues—and I consulted a more veteran politician. I said, "How do I make it through all these weeds at this sort of meeting? How do I deal with all this?" The advice I received from this woman was very wise. She said to me, "Think about the children. Think about the students. Think what is best for young people." When I look at this bill, I see a bill that does that. I see a bill that takes a look at the adoption system and takes a look at children's aid societies and the supports that are available, and it tries to pull it out of the weeds and say what's best for the child.

When you look at this bill, it contains two main thrusts: one, of course, dealing with adoption, which a number of the speakers have spoken about tonight, and the other, of course, with children's aid societies. It gives them the sort of tools and the flexibilities that they need to be more effective.

As we enter into November, we're coming up on the Christmas season, and I'd be remiss if I didn't talk for a second or two about my own children's aid society in my community. I see the member here from Waterloo-Wellington, who helped share that the Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region has their annual fundraising drive every Christmas. As well as being a

successful fundraising drive, what I see during that is the amount of community outpouring and support for that organization, because people recognize what an outstanding job they do and they also recognize the types of support they need. This bill will provide them with that support. This bill will provide for children in need. It's a child-focused bill, and I'm pleased to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Nickel Belt, you have two minutes to reply.

Ms. Martel: I'd like to thank all the members who participated, and just reiterate a few things that I said. I go back to my CAS that I have a good working relationship with, and I trust their judgment on many of these issues, and I wanted to raise their concerns.

I heard one of the members say, "Yes, of course, the financial supports are going to be there for the services that these children need." I hope that's true, but I can tell you that my own children's aid society raised that as the number one issue with me today. They're concerned that in fact financial resources will not be there to pay for the community supports that are going to continue to be necessary for children who might be in care now who when, and if, adopted are still going to need access to children's mental health services, residential care, respite care for those parents from time to time and the whole gamut. I would prefer to see the minister stand up very clearly in her place and send a message to the children's aid societies across the province and say, "Yes, absolutely, those financial supports are still going to be there. The government will pay for those. There will be no interruption in service and you don't have to worry that as an adoptive parent you're going to have to pay out of your own pocket to access these very important services. They're going to be there when you need them, and the government is going to cover the costs for that."

Secondly, there's going to have to be a shift in human resources within children's aid societies to deal with this. I go back to my concern about the funding model and is there enough money in the current funding in order to allow that to happen. My own CAS says, "The new funding model does not provide enough funding because it uses 2003-04 expenditures as the basis for funding and adjusts for inflation by 3%. This 3% covers two years (2004-05 and 2005-06). Salary settlements for the CAS of these two years have totalled 6%." So essentially, they've been flatlined. Our CAS has a \$1-million deficit right now. Where are the resources going to come from that allow them to shift from child protection, which they've been doing under the previous government's mandate, to have a bit more of a focus on actual adoption?

Our CAS is not alone. I'm sure any number of others are going to be in the same boat where their resources have been so tied up in protection that they're going to need additional resources to now deal with adoption.

The Speaker: Further debate?

2110

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak about Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I will be

sharing my time with the honourable member from Brant.

According to the York Region Children's Aid Society, children come first and children need solutions that are dependable, predictable and permanent. We have a responsibility as the elected government of Ontario to put forth legislation that will provide these solutions. Bill 210 will do exactly that.

This government has shown its devotion to the children of Ontario with countless pieces of legislation, from ensuring that children are properly nourished, to reducing classroom sizes so they can get the attention they need from their teachers, to proposing legislation which will no longer force children to exclude their birth parents from their lives in order to be considered for adoption. We are strongly focused on children. Children need to be protected. They should feel safe at home.

The legislation is focused on children or youth who are crown wards and in the care of children's aid societies. There are approximately 9,000 children in the permanent care of Ontario children's aid societies. In York region alone, there are more than 200 youngsters who are crown wards, and only 15 were adopted last year. These children live in either foster homes or group homes and move on average every 22 months. The goals of this legislation are clear and commendable. By truly putting the needs of these children first, they will have the opportunity to enjoy a fulfilling and productive childhood in a permanently nurturing and stable environment. This legislation is focused on making adoption more flexible for children and less difficult for the prospective adoptive parents. We can do something to ease the difficult transition for those children to a loving, supportive and stable environment.

Furthermore, this legislation will make children's aid societies more accountable, sustainable and stable. The proposed new options include mediation and a more individual approach to each child's specific needs rather than going through the more costly and lengthy court system. By changing the way children's aid societies do business, we can ensure that they are there for children who need them for years to come.

Over the last 10 years, there has been a 185% increase in the number of investigations into child protection cases. Over the last five years, there has been a 46% increase in the number of children in the protection of a children's aid society. These increasing numbers can be partially explained by better reporting by the public and individuals who work directly with children. In fact, all citizens have a moral obligation and a legal responsibility to report any suspected cases of child abuse. Since 2000, the legislation has been clarified to include neglect and emotional harm as a basis for child protection intervention. For eight long years, the previous government slashed social services and support programs that families depend on. Without those supports, more families reached a point where child protection intervention was required.

We have increased the budget for children's aid societies substantially over the last two years. This year,

our government increased funding to children's aid societies by over \$95 million, representing almost a 10% budget increase. But because this growth is not sustainable, we need to help children's aid societies operate more effectively.

We are taking three important steps to change the way they operate. First, this year the ministry began providing funding under a new model that puts a greater emphasis on the specific results we want to see for children, like more adoptions. Second, societies will have more options available to them when they respond to new cases. Societies will be better able to match their level of response to the needs of the children. Third and finally, legislative changes, if passed, should result in more extensive use of mediation to resolve child protection matters. This is not only more effective for children and families, it is more efficient for our family courts.

Our focus is on these children now and in the future. Children thrive in consistent, nurturing environments, and this legislation increases the chances of these children growing up in these kinds of environments. Our proposed legislation would make it easier for children in need of protection to find a permanent, loving home. When in a loving and stable home, children do better in school and form strong relationships. Expanding family-based care options means more children have the opportunity for a happy childhood and long-term success. We owe it to the children of Ontario to provide these solutions as they are available.

Currently, these children are required to sever all ties with their biological parents before even being considered for adoption. Similarly, the courts have been hesitant to consider adoption in many cases because it would cut off ties the child has with his or her birth family and community. Today, when a child is first removed from the care of his or her parents because of protection concerns, they are usually placed in an emergency foster home or group home. Under the current legislation, placing the child with an extended family member is not possible, because under the legislation a family member is not deemed a "place of safety." The new legislation will make it easier for relatives, including grandparents, to provide permanent homes for those children and youth who need one.

In cases where there is no kin to care for the child, adoption is their only chance for a stable environment. There are many cases where children love their birth parents but realize that their parents are unable to adequately provide for them. It is not right that a child should have to give up on their own parents for reasons that may not be anyone's fault. For instance, yesterday my colleague Minister Chambers provided a hypothetical example of a boy whose mother was mentally ill. That is just one example of a parent who is capable of loving but not providing. I am sure I don't have to tell you that forcing a child to sever all ties with a parent is not something that we should encourage unless the child is endangered by that parent.

The current system is simply too rigid. We need to have a system that meets the needs of the child, where

the rules fit the child instead of the child fitting the rules. A flexible and conscientious system could enable a child to be adopted by a loving family while still maintaining contact with their biological parents and their community. This clearly puts the needs of the child ahead of those of the biological parent and the adoptive parent. The proposed legislation truly looks out for the best interests of the child.

We also want to make it easier for the caring families across Ontario who desperately want to adopt. We know that many families would like to adopt a child locally but have found it is too difficult. Many prospective parents have to complete an application and home study for each individual children's aid society they approach. Currently, there are two ways that people can apply to adopt in Ontario. People can approach their local children's aid society or they can apply through the private and international adoption system. Under our proposed reform, we will streamline the process so there is one application and one home study for both CAS adoptions and private adoptions.

We feel that these important changes, as part of the overall legislation, will go a long way in providing children and families with the safety and stability they need and deserve.

In the words of Martin McNamara, executive director of York Region Children's Aid Society, this bill will help take child protection and safety to the next level. That's what we are trying to do, and therefore I believe that Bill 210 must be supported.

Mr. Levac: I deeply appreciate the opportunity to talk on this particular topic. I would suggest that there is so little time and so much to say that I would be tempted to ask for unanimous consent to go to midnight, but I'm not going to do that to these fine people.

But I want to suggest something. There hasn't been a single person in this House, from when I was first elected to now, who has not spoken with passion about protecting our children, and I want the people to know that that is so today. I want to compliment each and every one of the members who has spoken to this moment, and I would not want it to be misinterpreted that I am casting aspersions on anyone. I am complimenting every single member, because we need to send the message out, no matter what political party is sitting in this place, that we value our children to the degree that we are discussing this very serious issue. I want to thank each and every one of you for doing that.

2120

I would also suggest that it has been a very enlightening discussion. We've been hearing about some CASs that have had difficulty in looking at the new way of advancing themselves, and I want to say to you that I take pride in mentioning the Brantford and Brant area CAS. They have already started to do that restructuring. They have been moving forward with understanding that the child placement is an extremely important priority, so I want to compliment them, the city membership, the county membership, the volunteers on the CAS board and the staff, for seeing ahead of time that it needs to

restructure and that it fits itself into the new funding that's approaching. So I want to compliment them for that.

I want to suggest to you that we have established protocols in our school boards, we've established protocols in my office and we've established protocols at city hall for the protection of our children. I recommend that, if those protocols are not in place in anyone else's office, we consider doing that to ensure that our children and our parents who want and love those children are taken care of.

As a school principal and an educator for 25 years, I will tell you that I've been exposed many times to the harrowing experience of having children apprehended and asking staff to make that phone call, and supporting them and understanding that our education system is first and foremost designed to protect the safety and the welfare of our children. I would ask people to understand that it is the responsibility of any individual—not just the teacher, not just a teacher's aide, a secretary or a caretaker but the person next door or anyone else who is aware of child abuse in any shape or form—it is their responsibility, it is their duty, to call the CAS. It's their responsibility. It's not one group's responsibility to do this. I would say positively that many individuals and organizations have taken that step to ensure that our children are protected.

This piece of legislation is one more evolution. It's not the answer to all of our ills. It's one more evolution. I would dare say that there isn't a party in this House that hasn't made an attempt to make those improvements as well. Again, I come back to my passionate plea that we stay focused on that purpose, that when we do offer those solutions and those constructive criticisms, they are offered in that manner, and that we receive them, as this government, in the way in which they were intended. The most important thing we could be doing in this Legislature at this time is to create legislation to protect our children. Unfortunately, at times it's from their own parents, their own relatives, from schools, from friends and from neighbours. Unfortunately, that happens. In this day and age, in this society, let me suggest to you that it has happened many times before, but now we're bringing it out of the darkness and making it a cultural change.

For a moment, I want to talk about cultural change. In my education, I was taught about different cultures. I took sociology and psychology. What we learned was that there are different ways in which some cultures approach their children. During my teaching years, I came across a case at the CAS that was fascinating. What happened in that case? There was a European culture that had a tradition of curing stomach aches. Interesting, you say. What does that have to do with children? In this particular culture, they were able to pull together an herbal concoction, with various weeds and whatever, and they would rub it on a child's stomach to cure a stomach ache, and it worked. What was the by-product of that? Unfortunately, it created bruises.

One of the teachers did their job: The child was taking phys. ed., had exposed their stomach, and the teacher saw

massive bruising on the stomach and reported it to the CAS immediately, as they should have done because they suspected the child was being beaten. The CAS immediately did an investigation. If it hadn't have been for the sensitivity of the CAS intake worker who was doing the investigation and their understanding of what the cultural norm was, that child could have been apprehended and taken away from the family because they were acting in the best interests of the child. It was a little fortunate that they had somebody at the CAS who could speak the language, because we had a parent who didn't have a command of the English language and couldn't explain what they were doing. Until it was resolved, the child was held. Thankfully, it was resolved.

I tell that story for us to recognize and appreciate the extreme nuances that take place in cases of apprehension and protection. When we get to that point, we have to be darned sure of what we're doing.

What are we doing in Bill 210? What we're trying to accomplish in Bill 210 is to make that transition as painless and as little damaging psychologically as possible to those children, and to introduce—which has been done now and wasn't as commonplace as before—the extended family into the potential of bringing a loving home to that child.

A couple of members on the other side were referring to grandparents, and I'm so glad that they are making that reference, because I too have been receiving phone calls from grandparents looking for grandparents' rights. This is one piece of that puzzle that, I believe, if passed and if this bill becomes law, will address.

There have been some concerns brought up about the ADR, the alternative dispute resolution. There have been some concerns and expressions that it may create over-litigious situations and timely and costly functions. But let me try to reassure you about some of those situations, which have been researched. In these, you would include mediation instead of court. You would include family conferencing—trained by professionals, by the way. You would include another one that I am partial to because I am exposed to this in my riding, and that would be native talking circles.

It has been shown in evaluation and research that these three options consistently outperform the timely resolution of settlement rates, and have lower costs than the court proceedings. So there is evidence that shows, and I hope would dispel some of the concerns that are being expressed about creating a new system—some. I would acknowledge and accept that there are times in which all of those processes, no matter which ones you use, are going to cause some heartache and time constraints and costly litigation; they are there.

I think we need to do even more work, which is another reason why I appreciate the fact that we are going to be sending this to committee for those experts who have some solutions for us, for the tweaking that needs to be done with some of the sections of the bill.

One of the things that I've focused on for over 24 and a half years as an educator is the children in terms of the flow, the spectrum that the children experience through-

out this whole process. I would respectfully suggest that because we are looking at this bill in the way that we are—focusing on the child and what it means for adoption, to find that stable portion for their life for that time—if we are able to find that resolution in this bill, I can tell you from my experience as a teacher, as a principal and as somebody who reads the educational research, that you will see an improvement in school performance, social performance and the ability to get along with others, the types of homes we want to create and assist and help to create in this bill. Along with the other solutions that have been offered by previous governments, we continue to evolve to where we will be able to provide our children with that stability to help them be better citizens and, more importantly, better

persons. Why can I say that? It's easy to say, because all of the research to this point has indicated clearly that with a loving, stable and continuously supportive parent—I would use “parent” not to define it as simply a birth parent, but the person who is doing the raising—we end up with a better opportunity for that child to perform in our society.

I know we're at the end of the time, and I would offer up this compliment one more time: We are doing a good thing for our children.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, members, for the quality of debate tonight. However, it is 9:30 of the clock and this House is adjourned until 10 a.m. of the clock, November 3.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 2 November 2005

SECOND READINGS

An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts, Bill 210,

Mrs. Chambers

Ms. Horwath.....	685, 691
Mr. Qaadri	690
Mr. Yakabuski.....	691
Mr. Kormos	691, 695, 700, 704
Mrs. Chambers	691
Mr. Parsons	692
Mr. Leal.....	693, 696
Mr. Martiniuk.....	695
Ms. Martel	695, 699, 700, 705
Mrs. Van Bommel.....	695
Mr. Arnott	696, 700
Mr. Gerretsen	699
Mr. Wilson	699
Mrs. Mitchell.....	703
Mrs. Munro	704
Mr. Milloy	704
Mr. Racco.....	705
Mr. Levac	706
Debate deemed adjourned	708

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mercredi 2 novembre 2005

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois, projet de loi 210, <i>Mme Chambers</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné.....	708



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Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 3 November 2005

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (PSA TESTS FOR PROSTATE CANCER), 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ
(TEST PSA POUR LE DÉPISTAGE
DU CANCER DE LA PROSTATE)

Mr. Mauro moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 4, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 4, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Mauro, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I am pleased to rise this morning once again to have an opportunity to debate and move second reading of Bill 4, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act. This is a reintroduction of a private member's bill that I introduced in June of this year to make the PSA test, a blood test for men to find an indication of the potential for the existence of prostate cancer, an insurable service under OHIP.

In June 2005, when I first introduced the legislation, it was a little bit exciting. It was my first private member's bill, but quickly the reality of this institution struck me when I found out about 30 minutes later that that was the last day of the session in the spring and that it was likely that this bill would not be carried forward. So here I find myself again introducing what I feel is a very valid and legitimate piece of legislation that hopefully will end up being passed into law some day.

I'd like to begin by indicating that this test is something that does have a bit of controversy surrounding it. It is not something that is unanimously endorsed by everyone in the medical community. However, it is fair to say, I think, that there are more people in the medical community who do endorse it than who don't, and I think it's also fair to say that much of the resistance to the introduction of this piece of legislation, the PSA test as a

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 3 novembre 2005

valid test, comes from people in the non-medical community.

Part of the controversy stems, I think, from two pieces: One is that it can sometimes indicate a false negative, and there is a stress situation related to men who may find themselves in this situation; the other is the cost to the health care system. I'm going to leave those two for now; I will get back to those in a little while and speak to them a little later on in my 10 minutes.

There are a couple of things that are worth entering into the record statistically that I think I need to read in, and I'd like to do that for you now.

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every seven Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime, and 27% of them will die of it. In the year 2000 alone, prostate cancer caused the death of over 1,300 men in Ontario.

It's the third leading cause of cancer death among men. The irony, of course, with this statistic is that prostate cancer is one of the most curable of all of the cancers that exist, if it is detected early. That goes to why I feel very strongly about the introduction and the OHIP coverage of this test.

A recent study by University of Connecticut researchers shows that prostate cancer survivors fare relatively well and rarely deem the diagnosis to be a traumatic or life-altering event.

Those mainly at risk of prostate cancer are men 45 or older, those with a family history, and men of African descent. Other risk factors include diets high in fat, calories and red meat.

"PSA" stands for "prostate specific antigen." It is a blood test that measures a substance called prostate specific antigen, a protein produced by prostate cells and by prostate tumours.

As I mentioned earlier, there are also many who are in support of this. The medical practitioners most involved with the treatment of this disease are those who tend to lend the largest support to the insurability of the test. An Ipsos Reid survey shows that the vast majority of Ontario urologists—in fact, about 85% of them—believe that prostate-specific antigen screening tests for prostate cancer help reduce mortality in the general population and should be covered under provincial health insurance plans.

Mr. Aaron Bacher is the chairman of the Man to Man Prostate Cancer Support Group here in the greater Toronto area. I believe this particular support group is the

largest in Ontario, and maybe in Canada. What Mr. Bacher and his group have had to say is this:

"As chairman of the Toronto Man to Man Prostate Cancer Support Group, the largest such group in Canada, we see too many men at our meetings who are the direct result of putting off getting a PSA test done until it was too late. All the men who come to our meetings do so after being diagnosed with prostate cancer, and they come to us looking for answers. We hear about how they didn't get the test done because it was going to cost them a few dollars, or their GP told them it wasn't necessary because of the cost or that the test is 'unreliable.'"

As I've mentioned already, we know all about some of the controversy that surrounds the test, but it is still the only test available. According to Mr. Bacher, until something else comes along, it's all we have to deal with. Every one of the men in their group credits the PSA test for having saved their lives.

One of the things that has changed that I would like to talk about in terms of scientific data coming forward to support the insurability of this test, one of the recent innovations, is something that's referred to in the medical community as the velocity of change or the rapidity of change. What that would require is for PSA tests to start to be administered by medical practitioners on a regular basis. That would provide a baseline of data which the medical practitioners would have to refer back to when they administer subsequent tests.

One test indicating a high PSA level is not necessarily an indicator of the existence of prostate cancer, although it may be. This is what some of the controversy surrounds. However, if we were to begin using this new model, the rapidity or the velocity of change, we would be able to compare a first PSA testing level to a second and a third PSA testing level. The velocity of change in those readings is a very reliable indicator of the potential existence of prostate cancer in men. Of course, this is very key because, as we know, early detection leads to early cure.

Laurence Klotz is a professor of surgery at the University of Toronto, and he speaks on this issue. He is the head of the prostate cancer group at Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre. On the issue of this rapidity and velocity of change, he had this to say:

"A rapid rise in PSA has been clearly demonstrated to be associated with aggressive prostate cancer. Furthermore, by the time someone developed advanced prostate cancer, the PSA is almost always very high. The widespread use of PSA testing has resulted in the disease being diagnosed at a stage when it is much more curable. More important, death from prostate cancer has dropped 25% in the past years in North America. This advance test deserves as large a headline as the one casting suspicion on the PSA test."

1010

There are many reasons why I believe we need to be funding the PSA test and other tests of a like nature. We in this Legislature are all very familiar with the challenges our health care system faces in terms of its very

sustainability. We all know about the challenges it faces from a financial perspective. We all know that our health care budget represents about 40% to 45% of the overall provincial expenditures in this province, somewhere in the order of \$30 billion to \$35 billion out of about \$75 billion or \$80 billion in total, and we all know it's continuing to increase. In fact, there was an article in the paper just this morning talking about how health care expenditures are expected to increase by an additional 7.5% or 8% this year.

We have seen those increases continuing on a regular basis over the last number of years, and if any of us are interested in the survivability of the system, we need to find ways to manage it better. I would suggest that one of those ways is by the introduction of more preventive tests that will lead to early cures because, as we all know, if we can catch these things early, it is much less expensive to deal with them earlier than later.

By way of example, I will tell you that if the test as it currently exists costs about \$25 or \$30, a radical prostatectomy, once diagnosed in its early stages, would cost the health care system about \$16,000. A radical prostatectomy, or the treatment of the disease after it has spread, would cost in the order of \$30,000. So I think it's fair to say that one early detection would pay for the cost of approximately 1,000 of these tests.

We all know that in this province we have an aging population, and concurrent with that aging population is going to be an explosion in certain diseases associated with aging. One of them is advanced prostate cancer for men. Others, such as different dementias and things like that—diabetes is a very dangerous one where we expect a large explosion in numbers, as the population ages in Ontario. I would suggest that we may end up in a position where we do not have a choice except to begin to get more proactive in our approach to these diseases as they begin to increase in numbers.

The challenge, of course, for government is that in many cases we are all running around putting out fires. We have so many acute pressures on the health care system that it's difficult to find the resources to put into preventive measures as we try and deal with the challenges we have. Also, governments have not been historically good at doing things the benefits of which accrue five, 10 or 15 years down the road. I would suggest that we are at a point here where we no longer have a choice, where prevention needs to become a large part of what we do. It is better for the patients, and clearly it will be better for the long-term sustainability of the very system we hold so dear in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed, we have with us in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Hong Kou District People's Congress of Shanghai, China. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

Applause.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I'm pleased to rise in support of the bill presented by my colleague from Thunder Bay. At the outset, I want to underline that

I think this should be a non-partisan issue. The previous government didn't take action in this regard and the current government isn't. I think the member opposite is bringing forward this bill to try to push the ball forward, and I commend him for doing that.

The bottom line for me, and the bottom line for many of the people I represent in Nepean–Carleton, is that we believe that in the fight against cancer we need to use all the tools at our disposal, and this is only one of them. I've had a number of constituents over the years come in and speak to me about this issue. I've seen the bureaucratic gobbledegook that I'm sure the member opposite has seen and the explanations on why this can't be done, rather than looking at the case for why it should be done.

There was a very powerful story in Ottawa, one that involved the media. The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario each year recognizes journalists for their contribution to health care reporting, and there was a very personal story about a community leader, about a colleague and friend of the journalist by the name of Carol Anne Meehan, who put a series together on prostate cancer on CJOH television. This had a huge impact, not just on my views but on the number of calls I received in my constituency office.

She put on a series about her colleague and friend Max Keeping. Max Keeping is an anchor at the local newscast and a real community leader, someone who does more than 200 community events per year and who is probably the favourite son of Ottawa. Mr. Keeping went public with his illness in order to inspire others to get tested for this type of cancer, which, as the member opposite said, affects one out of eight Canadian men. The good news is that this type of cancer is curable, but only if detected early. Something that irks Mr. Keeping and something that irks many of us is that this PSA test used to diagnose this cancer is not covered by OHIP, and it only costs an extra \$25. The member opposite spoke about how detecting one case early could literally pay for about 1,000 tests—let alone the human cost, which is something that is quite important.

PSA tests aren't perfect, but they are the best diagnostic tool we have at our disposal. DNA science work is holding out great promise, but in the interim this is certainly the very best diagnostic tool. One of the fundamental inconsistencies in all this is that PSA tests are covered by the taxpayer if they're done in a hospital. How in one silo of our health care system the taxpayers and the government and our publicly funded health care system will pay for it and in another they won't is, quite simply, baffling. The bottom line, if you ask Max Keeping, if you ask anyone who has gone through this, is: Are we going to place our trust in Ontario's doctors to make this decision if they hold it to be a wise one? The bottom line is that men shouldn't be dying from this. It has put a huge pressure on a number of families.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge that one of the great shames to government—not just to this government but to the previous government—you could see in Cornwall, Ontario. I don't know if our colleague from Cornwall is

here. The Victorian Order of Nurses raised money privately to put on a clinic in Cornwall, Ontario, this past September. They raised money privately, they felt so strongly about this. In this PSA clinic, held at the Cornwall Square shopping centre, some 300 men attended and some 30 tested positive. That really does put the government to shame, whether it's this government or the previous government. That shows that there's a huge amount of support out there and that people are prepared to act on their own.

I will be voting in favour of the bill. I'd like to see it moved through committee on an expeditious basis and for a final vote on third reading.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): It is so much fun to be in the Legislature debating a bill with a fellow northerner, in this case from northwestern Ontario, all the way across on the other side of the part of northern Ontario that I represent.

I want to say up front that we will support this motion. We New Democrats believe that public health means a public health care system, and that a service that is essential for the well-being of people should be a service that is paid for by the public purse through our public health care system. We agree that PSA tests would be a good thing to be covered off publicly.

I've got to say that as an adult male over the age of 45, I've been going every couple of years for the PSA test myself. I figure it's a good idea. We have a family history where some of the males in our family have actually succumbed to prostate cancer, so that's something you have to watch. I don't mind. I can afford to pay the 25 or 50 bucks or whatever it is. But not everybody is as fortunate as me. Not everybody makes a decent salary of \$90,000 plus a year and can afford to do it. I think one of the things we've learned in our health care system is that what you really need to do is to try to make access to health care as easy as possible for the individual, so that they're not discouraged to be tested for something that might be life-threatening. Quite frankly, for the health care system, it probably saves them money in the long run.

1020

Let me make this argument: If someone is not caught early when it comes to the diagnosis of a disease—in this case, prostate cancer—it's much more expensive for the health care system, I would say, to catch this disease when it's further into the line of progression. Obviously, more radical treatment, more radical surgery and more radical approaches need to be taken to deal with the disease. If we're able to get to it a lot earlier, we're in a much better position to manage the disease, save the health care system a lot of money and, more importantly, make it a much easier medical intervention for the person who is being tested. So I support that.

I find it a bit odd that a government member would have to bring a private member's bill forward for this. George Smitherman is a competent Minister of Health; I've said that a number of times. Certainly I think George, at heart, wants to make the health care system

better. But I wonder why it is that a government member has to get a private member's bill to do something that his government should be doing in the first place. I know George feels pretty strongly about this issue as well and I wonder why there has not been more discussion within the Liberal caucus and ultimately at the Liberal cabinet table to say, "How much is this going to cost and is this something that we could afford to do?" So I have to draw a couple of conclusions by way of this debate today: Either that has not happened, which I find a bit sad, or it has happened and the government doesn't want to go there—equally just as sad.

I don't want to rain on the parade of the member for Thunder Bay, but, in part, that's what I'm doing. I would think these kinds of discussions happen within the Liberal caucus when it comes to deciding what should be funded and what direction the government should take on various initiatives. That was certainly the case when I was a member of a government caucus. You would bring those issues to your caucus, you would have a discussion, it would then be referred to one of the cabinet committees to take a look at the issue and then it would be brought back to caucus as a formal report in order to make a decision if the caucus wanted to go in that direction.

I'd be interested in knowing from the member, when he has a chance to wrap up in his last two minutes, where that is. Is the government seriously looking at this and is this an attempt to showcase and move the idea forward, at which point we'd support you wholeheartedly, or should we be somewhat worried? Do you need a little bit more help? Should members of the opposition be standing up here and asking questions of the Minister of Health, helping you out? I know it would be a little bit more difficult for a backbench member of the Liberal government to get up and go after his own minister. If you need that, you don't have to drop me a brown envelope; just come and talk to me. I'd be glad to do it.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): You'd be too shy to do that.

Mr. Bisson: I'm a very shy member, you've got to know. I am so shy, I shake every time I stand up in the Legislature to ask a question or anything. But if you need help in that way, I'm serious to do it.

In regard to the benefits of the testing, I know there's some controversy on this issue. You have some people in the medical profession who say the PSA tests can give you a false negative or a false positive. In talking to my own family doctor about this particular issue, we've had the discussion about whether you should rely entirely on the PSA test. The answer is no, but the PSA test is certainly one of the tools that is available to the medical community for early detection, if you should have a condition that is starting to develop as far as your prostate. I think men need to take this very seriously and say, "There are things we have to do other than just the PSA test to make sure that we are properly tested." So I would encourage anybody who is watching to go and see your doctor once a year, at the very least. You should get a full

examination, not only for the prostate but for other conditions like blood pressure, which I'm a candidate for. I've always had high blood pressure, since I was about 16 years old. It's certainly a hell of a lot higher since I've been here, but that's a whole other story. So we need to take that seriously, and I would encourage people to do that.

It also brings us to the issue—and I want to do this because I know the member would agree with me on the following point, which is somewhat removed from prostate tests but connected to our health care system, and that is access to health services for people in Ontario. If you're living in Toronto, Hamilton, Ottawa, Windsor or some of the bigger centres, you don't think about this; you take it for granted. "I don't feel well; I'll go see my doctor." If the doctor thinks there's something, he'll send you to a clinic or to the hospital and you get a test in a relatively short period of time.

For people living in northwestern or northeastern Ontario, that's not the case. Far too often, people don't have a family doctor. In Kapuskasing, for example, you have a lot of people who don't have family doctors. Right now, the Minister of Health is actually looking at a proposal from the town of Kapuskasing, from the citizens there, to open up a health clinic as a way to alleviate some of the pressure on our current doctors. I certainly hope the government is going to look at that favourably. I know the Minister of Health is looking at that and I encourage him to lend all of his support to the Kapuskasing proposal. If there is a proposal out there that needs approval, I would argue that is the one, because of the situation they have in Kapuskasing, and in the area as well.

My point is that we really do have a problem in northern Ontario when it comes to access to health services. Some of the most basic services sometimes are very difficult to have access to, especially if you don't live in one of the five major regional centres in northern Ontario: Timmins, North Bay, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie. If you live in one of the smaller, outlying communities, it gets pretty darn difficult. For example, if you live in Hearst and you have to be on dialysis, you can't get dialysis services in Hearst. You have to either drive down two or three times a week to Kapuskasing or you have to go to Timmins. That's not the easiest thing in the world to do at times, especially in the winter months when the weather is not so good.

Imagine living in some of our remote communities on the James Bay or up in northwestern Ontario. Those communities are isolated from health services entirely. They don't even have doctors in their communities. We have physicians who fly in from Weeneebayko hospital and through the James Bay General Hospital. They have an agreement to share doctors. Depending on what community you're in, you're either served by the James Bay General or the Weeneebayko hospital. But you have to bring doctors in by plane on a weekly basis, if you're lucky, to deal with some of the most basic things that we take for granted when it comes to health services.

I want to report to members of this House that there is an initiative in northeastern Ontario that is spurred by this government and the federal government, to which I give total support, and that is the integration of their health care system on the James Bay coast. Currently, the federal government runs part of the health system on the James Bay, through the Weeneebayko General Hospital—good people who do a good job. Pat Chilton, who is the CEO of the hospital, is doing a great job of motivating his team, providing services and running the system efficiently, all within the budget. Then you have Peter Fabricus on the provincial side, at the James Bay General, along with his board, doing an absolutely amazing job of providing services, not only when it comes to acute care services, but services within the community—everything from mental health services and others.

The problem is, there is a disconnect, because you have this federal-provincial system, depending on what community you're in. If you're in the community of Attawapiskat, you're served by James Bay General Hospital, where you have a hospital wing and you have services. If you're in Kashechewan or Peawanuk, you find yourself in the federal system and you have a health clinic. So the attempt is to work toward integrating those two hospitals into one provincial hospital.

I want to say on the record, this is something I wholeheartedly support. I think the government is going completely in the right direction, and a good example of why I think they're going in the right direction is what happened in Kashechewan over the last couple of weeks. The federal government, in my view, is not only disinterested but, quite frankly, doesn't have the capacity to deal with many of the issues that are important to the people of the James Bay and northwestern Ontario. It's not that the federal government is evil; I don't argue that. Sometimes I feel that, but—

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka):
Incompetent.

Mr. Bisson: Incompetent, I would say is the case. But the problem is that they don't have the depth and capacity in the bureaucracy to do this. Let me give you an example. I try sometimes to equate it this way: Imagine you have two baseball teams, the provincial baseball team, which let's say is the Ministry of Health, and the federal baseball team, which is the federal Department of Health. The provincial government supports hospitals, doctors, community health clinics, mental health, developmentally handicapped children. It has a complete breadth of services that we have established across this province to make sure that we have an integrated health service, so that there are not just independent silos within health services, but people work together. It's like having a baseball team with nine players on the field. You've got a full bench of baseball players sitting on the bench who are just as good as the people out on the field, if not better, and you've got a great management team. You've got the trainers, you've got the doctors, you've got everybody to keep the baseball team going. Federally,

you've got nine players and maybe a manager; that's about it. That would be the analogy. It's not because the federal government is evil; it's just that they don't have the breadth or the depth of bench to provide the kind of support needed for our health care system in aboriginal communities. I think people will be much better served by the province because that's what we do best.

1030

The second point is that in the transfer of the federal hospital over to the province, we need to ensure that the dollars that the federal government now spends on Weeneebayko and other health services on the James Bay come to the province on an annual basis, so that the total sum of money we get to operate services on the James Bay is sufficient to provide full services. It would be a travesty—I would say, a crime—if all of a sudden the federal government says, "All right, we're going to give you some capital dollars to build a hospital somewhere on James Bay, and we're going to get out of the health business." Well, get out of the health business, but you still have a fiduciary responsibility to First Nations. I would argue that the federal government needs to recognize that and needs to make sure there's an annual allocation to the province to make sure that we have sufficient dollars not just to provide services at Moose Factory or Moosonee or wherever it might be, but that we have services that we offer across James Bay.

Now, a good model is James Bay General Hospital. They operate a hospital that has a number of wings in different communities. Attawapiskat, Moosonee and Fort Albany are all wings of one big hospital. So when you go into Fort Albany or Attawapiskat, you have a physical structure that looks like a hospital, that has emergency services, that has a complement of qualified staff to deal with the health services in those communities, that has ambulances to pick people up in the event of an emergency. But if you go into the federal system, in Kash-echewan or Peawanuck, you don't have that. It's not that the people working in the federal health stations are not dedicated workers; they are. But they don't have the kind of support that they need, funding-wise, from the government to allow them to do a full range of services.

For example, what we should end up with at the end in each of our communities, including Moosonee, is a wing of a hospital that has emergency services, acute-care services and also long-term-care services combined into the same facility, so that people, when they're in need of long-term care, don't have to be shipped to Cochrane or Timmins to get long-term-care services. Those services should be available in the community and be coordinated with the health clinics we have currently within those communities so that we're able to provide community health services. I think it's a great model, and I encourage Minister George Smitherman to continue the fine work that he's done and his ministry has done in working forward to bring those services to the people of James Bay.

In the last minute or so that I have on this, I just want to end by saying to our good friend the member from

Thunder Bay-Atikokan that Owen Lindsey died—as you well know, a good friend of ours. I thought you might want to know that. It just came to mind, as we just got the message yesterday. Owen was a long-time member of our party who worked quite hard in Atikokan on behalf of the New Democrats. I know you would know who Owen is, and you'll probably want to send a note. I just thought of that as I'm standing here, because I thought of Atikokan. I thought I'd pass that on to you. We're going to miss Owen for sure.

But I just want to say that we as New Democrats will support you. We think it's important that health services be as accessible as humanly possible to the general public so that people don't think they can't afford or can't go get a test that could be life-saving, but that also in the longer term could save our health care services lots of dollars. I would just ask the member in his summation if he could give us a sense of where his government is at with all of this, and why he chose the strategy of a private member's bill rather than having the government do it as their own initiative. Should I read something out of that? Should I not? I'd be interested to know.

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to stand up this morning, Thursday morning, in the House and speak on this bill. First, obviously and without any hesitation, I'm totally in support of the bill, which would amend the Health Insurance Act to cover the cost of screening for prostate cancer. It currently costs around \$25. I also want to thank the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan for continuing with his work in bringing the bill forward. I also want to share with the House that probably for the last five or six months, I've had the pleasure of reading petitions in from my riding. Many men have been in to see me, and even some women have come in and expressed that they feel this should be covered. So I've been pleased to be able to do that.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and the second most deadly after lung cancer. Also, because of our aging population, it's the fastest-growing cancer among men. I want to mention the names of some very significant people who have just recently passed away because of this: Jerry Orbach of Law & Order, at the age of 69; Greenpeace founder Bob Hunter, at the age of 63; and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, at the age of 80—all too young.

Like most cancers, prostate cancer, if caught in time, is treatable and curable. You can ask former American Senator Bob Dole, who was fortunate. Prostate cancer, if caught in time, is one of the most treatable cancers. Instead of PSA testing costing the government money, not only can it save lives; it can add millions of dollars to our economy. It's simply a matter of dollars and cents. PSA tests can screen for the presence of increased prostate specific antigens. This test can help identify many men at risk. Presently, six out of 10 provinces cover the test. If all goes well with the bill, we'll be the seventh.

If one quarter of the 2.4 million males over the age of 40 took the test in Ontario, it would cost around \$16 mil-

lion. And yes, that is a lot of money. It costs around \$16,000 for each prostate test, and to treat the disease later it's around \$32,000. So based on those numbers, if we caught one third earlier through PSA testing, the government would actually save the medical system about \$24 million. This type of return on investment is simply a no-brainer. Further, if we're able to cure those who have prostate cancer now, we could actually pump an additional \$68 billion into the Ontario economy over the expected lifetimes of those who have been cured.

Screening may not be perfect, but it can save lives, and it can help the Ontario economy if it's properly implemented. This is certainly an important job for the Honourable Jim Watson, our excellent Minister of Health Promotion. I'm quite sure that the Minister of Health, who certainly has the heart of Ontarians for health care and is constantly working on improving it, and the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Dwight Duncan, would applaud such a pragmatic approach to health care.

In closing, I would like to say that a healthy Ontario is a wealthier Ontario. And I would also urge all my colleagues, on all sides of the House, to support this bill for my colleague Bill Mauro, the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan. Again, I congratulate him for his passion and caring about the health of Ontarians.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to join in this debate. I certainly will be supporting this bill—as I did, by the way, on June 9, 2005. I believe the member brought essentially the same bill forward at that time.

What does confuse me is why we are here debating this bill again. We shouldn't be here; we should be in committee dealing with the specifics of the bill and ensuring that it moves on to third reading and, ultimately, passage and adoption by the government.

I'm concerned that perhaps this government is not serious about this. If it was, it would have taken the direction of this House in June 2005, when it passed this bill for second reading—it didn't. At the very least, it could have carried this bill on. Instead, it allowed it to die on the order paper, which means the honourable member has to reintroduce the bill again today and take another morning of debate on this.

I will say, for the benefit, and perhaps for the help, of the honourable member, that he should encourage his Minister of Health—and I do so, through this debate—with the commitment that his Premier made during the last election.

I want to read into the record—for the benefit of the honourable member, he can take this and show it to the Premier—a letter from the Retired Teachers of Ontario. It's addressed to Dalton McGuinty, April 8, 2005:

"On behalf of the political action committee of the Retired Teachers of Ontario ... we are seeking an update on the position of your government related to the funding of the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test.

"In November 2002, in your then role as opposition leader, you responded to a similar inquiry ... with the following statement: 'In light of the fact that physicians are ordering the test because they view it as a medical

necessity, the Ontario Liberals believe it should be made available to patients free of charge.'

"As it has almost been a year and a half since your government was formed, our political action committee is anxious to know when you plan to make the PSA test available, free of charge, so we may share this information with our 55,000 members. We hasten to point out that this is indeed a gender equity matter.

"We look forward to your reply at your earliest convenience."

Signed Helen Biales, president, and James Guerard, chair, political action committee.

1040

I read that into the record because clearly this is another commitment that the Premier made. It has now been more than two years since they have been in office and formed the government, and we still see no action on this. In fact, he's forcing his member to reintroduce a private member's bill that was already passed in this House in the last session.

I concur with my colleague who said earlier, "What is this all about?" Why do we have to go through this process? We either believe this is the right thing to do or we don't. The House has expressed its view that it is. The Premier made his promise more than four years ago that he would. He's been Premier for two years plus, and we still don't have action. I hope this isn't a charade.

I'm supporting—and I know that my colleagues will support—the honourable member in his well-intentioned presentation of this bill for debate again today. I'm with him. We're all with you. Now it's up to the government to act.

There is absolutely no mystery to what has to be done. The Minister of Health simply has to take this forward to cabinet and say, "This is what we're going to do." We don't have to go through committee; we don't have to go through any further debate, any more procedure. I call on the government to respect the honourable member's call for this PSA test to be included under OHIP, and we hope we get on with it.

Mr. McNeely: I was fortunate enough to be with Minister Smitherman yesterday at the CHEO hospital in Ottawa where an announcement was made for the newborn screening laboratory that will be set up there: a \$5-million investment in the technology and, I believe, \$13 million going forward per year for operation.

This is just a great announcement for us, and it's an announcement that ties into this morning: that we're trying to detect diseases early and be able to treat them. So that was a great day for Ottawa and a great day for the province because over 100,000 children in this province will now be treated, I believe, for 27 rare genetic diseases, including 20 inherited metabolic disorders.

We're talking about the same thing this morning, and I'm very pleased to support my colleague from Thunder Bay—Atikokan for this extension of PSA testing to be funded by OHIP.

I have a bit of experience with it because my brother Frank was not tested, was not treated early, and died very

prematurely, at 57 years. That's only 12 years ago. He left a young family. So it's very important that we have these tests.

I went through the tests. I got a family doctor—I just recently changed last spring. I got a positive test back and so went through the other tests. Sure, you're concerned when you get back a positive test, but once you get the good news after further testing that there's no problem, it's certainly good. That is one of the criticisms: that you get these tests back that may be positive but are not indicative of having the disease. But that's one of the little things we have to go through.

When you hear statistics that say that one in seven men is expected to develop this potentially deadly disease in their lifetime, that 1,300 men will die this year because of the disease, it makes you stop and think. Of course, knowing there is a test that can detect prostate cancer before it becomes lethal gives men a sense of security. At least we can all go to the doctor and have a checkup. When I was told the test was going to be \$25, it wasn't difficult for me to say, "Oh, fine, that's good. Let's go ahead." But I guess in my brother's case, and in a lot of cases, you don't have the test because I believe the medical system just says, "Oh, you probably don't need it. Don't spend the \$25." I don't know why we don't go through it, but in a lot of cases the \$25 is the impediment to not having the test. It seems logical that a test can detect prostate cancer early enough to treat it. All men should be having these tests, and OHIP should be covering it.

I understand there are many valid arguments that say the test should not be covered, but I think the arguments we've heard here have all shown that these arguments are not really good enough. So which is worse—not having that test, or getting that test and having those positive results? I can't believe that that is the reason that we should not be going forward with this. It's the best test we have. It's one that's supported by many, many doctors and it would certainly save lives, would save that hardship that comes with prostate cancer.

A study conducted in 2000 shows there would be actually savings to the government. That was mentioned by other people earlier today. That savings has to be looked at. The savings can't be just in dollar terms. If it's almost there that this is a zero cost to the government, then we should be going ahead with it. I'm sure that our minister will be looking at it.

If this bill is adopted, it will certainly save that hesitation. We will see more tests. I think the member presenting this bill has shown that by monitoring the differences in the test results, the indicators are going to be there and the proper treatment will be done at the right time.

Our government has made great strides to ensure that Ontarians get the health care they need. We're very pleased in Ottawa to see that we have two more MRIs. We're getting more knee and joint replacements. We're getting a lot of additional coverage that we never had in the past. Speaking from a perspective of an Ottawa

person, we're very, very pleased. We have an MRI in our own area of Orléans. This is just moving ahead, and I'm sure that this one step to have these tests paid by OHIP would be a great move forward.

Interjection.

Mr. McNeely: That's right. We've made great strides. I don't see the member, but we have made great strides in the last two years in bringing Ottawa into the same level of health services as the rest of the province. So whether it's reducing waiting times for major procedures, introducing family health teams, or making sure people can get the care they need close to home, our government is working toward providing the best health care to all Ontarians. After many years of neglect, we are giving our health care system the boost it needs. This bill is in line with the goals of our health care transformation. I believe it would complement our government's efforts and make a great addition to the host of improvements we are making in health care.

Simply put, PSA tests save lives, PSA tests save money and PSA tests are recommended by doctors.

I appreciate having been given the time to speak on this very important bill, and I urge all members to support it.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): To begin with, I'm going to stand here this morning and say that it's almost disappointing that we're back here. This bill should have been carried forward in the last group of private members' bills, and I compliment the member for bringing the bill forward again. I am in full support of this bill.

I've heard some of the comments from the Liberal members here this morning, and one of the things I haven't heard them say is this: Dalton McGuinty did promise this treatment. He did promise this testing would take place. You heard that from the member from Oak Ridges. What Dalton McGuinty didn't promise to the people of the province of Ontario was the \$2.8-billion health tax. Some \$2.8 billion is what you've raised with that. So it's unacceptable that this is not covered by that today. I think that for men in the province of Ontario who are trying to look after themselves, this cost, this \$25—plus I believe there is a tax on that as well—is something that I believe that Ministry of Health should be covering, particularly in light of the fact we now have another \$2.8 billion to work with. They continue to tell folks how important that \$2.8-billion health premium is to the citizens of the province of Ontario, which averages out to about \$1,000 per family. It's unacceptable that we haven't seen some kind of movement so the government could support its own member.

1050

I also want to say, in my riding I'm fortunate that I have one organization in particular. It's called the Orillia Prostate Cancer Awareness group. It's a bunch of gentlemen—most of them have come into contact with prostate cancer in the past, and they have worked very hard to bring as much awareness to all of the men and women in the community that so they can bring aware-

ness to make sure that people get this testing. I can tell you that under the leadership of Mr. Colin Wackett, they have spent an enormous amount of time trying to bring this awareness to all the folks and make sure they get that testing done. As a matter of fact, they're also working in the Ride for DAD program. I don't know if many of the communities across the province have that, but I know it's been going on for about four or five years. Under the guidance of the police associations across the province—in my area, of course, it's the Ontario Provincial Police Association—they operate the Ride for DAD program. I think last year they had about 400 motorcycles—I believe it was in early May—that did a tour of north Simcoe county, and they raised over \$100,000 for prostate cancer awareness. Some of that money will flow to the cancer care unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital for their future development as well.

I just want to congratulate the member once again for bringing this forward. It is disappointing that your Premier actually did promise this to specific groups and, in fact, today you're spending another hour of very valuable time here to try to send your message. It's important that we support this bill in this House and that the citizens of the province of Ontario support this bill, and of course it's really important that men and young men from across our province take the time to get their PSA test. Hopefully, at some point in the not-too-far future, that fee will be covered by your health card. Thank you very much for this opportunity to say a few words this morning.

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise in support of this bill, standing in the name of Mr. Mauro, the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan. I feel rather compelled to speak to the comments just made by the member opposite. He might know that I had a private member's bill that took nine years to pass. His government had the opportunity to pass that bill, but it wasn't, until Minister Takhar took my private member's bill on school bus safety and passed it. Five different Conservative ministers refused to pass that bill. I congratulate our member, Mr. Mauro, from Thunder Bay-Atikokan, who has introduced it twice now, on his tenacity to ensure that people have full access to this PSA test that deals with prostate cancer and to ensure that it will become an insured service—access for all persons.

I think that basically what we're hearing here this morning is not so much a debate but a conversation about the merits of this bill; that's what we're hearing this morning. I hear from all parties that they favour this bill. I think it is commendable that the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan has brought this forward and has a bill that not only helps people within his riding, but even beyond, in the whole province of Ontario.

Not only will this be of benefit to males in our society here in Ontario, but also to their families. This bill has a very wide scope. Yes, it is a bill that deals with a health care issue of men alone, but remember the families of cancer victims. Too sadly, many of us in this House know of someone who has died of cancer of one type or

another. This bill will be of benefit to families and to males in our society.

What this PSA test will do is provide for early detection. It is important that a prostate-specific antigen test be taken. That test can lead to further tests that might save a life, and no doubt would. We should be doing all we can to prevent disease and the spread of disease once it is found. This bill will do that. It will help to save lives. That is the most important part of this whole discussion.

Two others have mentioned, and I want to put on the record, that the baby boomers are moving along in age. I believe there are some three million-plus baby boomers in Ontario, many of them males. They're aging, and age is one of the significant factors in this particular cancer. We must do everything we can to make sure that people have access to this test to save lives.

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime—one in eight—and 27% of them may die. In the year 2000 alone, prostate cancer caused the deaths of over 1,300 men in Ontario. Up to 20,000 Canadian men are newly diagnosed every year. Some five million Canadian men are currently in those cancer risk years, the ages between 45 and 70. It is a significant problem. It is a significant cancer among many men.

In New Brunswick, this is covered universally; in Newfoundland and Labrador it is covered universally; in Nova Scotia it is covered universally; and the Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and the Yukon all cover it universally. We should be doing the same thing in Ontario for our population. This is quite simply the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do. We have agreement here. This has been more a discussion rather than a debate.

I want to thank the member for bringing this forward. I believe this should move to committee swiftly. It should be taken to the committee as soon as possible, and I think it should come back to this House for swift passage. This will give access to all for what has been stated to be a rather cheap test monetarily, but it will save lives. I commend the member for his efforts.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): It's a pleasure to rise once again to speak to the bill brought forward by the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan to amend the Health Insurance Act for PSA testing. I spoke in the last session about this bill and the value it has to everyone in the province of Ontario. I have very specific examples in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock where I have had gentlemen e-mail me and contact me about the value of PSA testing, and I'd like to thank them for that.

As a former nurse, I'm totally aware of the attention to prevention and early detection that we must do and progress on in this province. We've heard all kinds of stories about cancer survivors where early detection was the vital life-saving factor. I would be extremely disappointed if this government were to delay the progress of this bill again and not realize the potential the bill holds.

I'm very happy to have heard the stories from all sides of the Legislature today on the benefits that this test can have in preventing deaths. We've heard a lot of facts. I know that prevention and early detection and access to doctors are vital for this.

I know there has been some downplaying of the positive role of the PSA test. The prostate specific antigen test uses blood samples. It's an easy test, and it follows the progress of prostate cancer. When PSA levels rise in blood, doctors are then alerted to pursue further tests to detect early if a male has this debilitating disease. Canadian researchers assert that screening men with PSA tests before any symptoms of cancer are evident may reduce the risk of getting metastatic prostate cancer by 35%. I think those statistics are important for all of us.

The present government has delisted many services, but this vital early-prevention test will hopefully not be another casualty of this government. They've got increased revenues from their health tax, and I want to see the speedy passage of the PSA test and that this be brought forward as soon as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Mauro, the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Mauro: A quick thank you to all the members who have spoken on the legislation: the members from Chatham–Kent–Essex, Ottawa–Orléans, Niagara Falls, Simcoe North, Nepean–Carleton, Oak Ridges, Timmins–James Bay and Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

There are about three points I'd like to touch on in the quick two minutes I have to wrap on this issue. One is that when I first introduced this legislation in June this year, in the lead up to the introduction of that legislation, I, probably like other members of the Legislature, received a lot of very supportive e-mails, comments and letters on the introduction of this legislation and the hope that the funding of PSA testing would pass. I can tell you that contained in those supportive messages was the fact that many people in Ontario, and even those from outside the province, viewed the non-funding of this test as discriminatory in nature. I can tell you it was not something I had considered when I introduced the legislation, or that compelled me to introduce the legislation. However, there are many groups that find and view this in that context. It's been referenced by others here today.

1100

The second piece is a bit about the controversy of the test that I and others have touched on in terms of trying to provide some balance to the discussion. It's not controversial in many other places; the efficacy of the test is not in question in a lot of places. Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island all support and currently fund PSA testing completely in their provinces. A sixth province, BC, will pay for the test if in fact that test comes back positive. Those people and those provinces are not having a difficulty with the efficacy of this test.

The last thing I would like to say, and that I touched on in my opening remarks in my initial 10 minutes, was on a bit of a macro issue: that we're all here to try and

ensure the sustainability of the system that we have in this province. Many of you have probably read the book by Michael Rachlis; I believe it was called Prescription for Excellence. We have challenges in this system that we're all aware of. One of the ways that we can deal with some of those challenges is by somehow finding the resources and pulling them away from these acute challenges that we deal with on a day-to-day basis, and trying to put some of those resources into preventive measures such as PSA testing for men, this blood test.

HOME FIRE SPRINKLER ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS AUTOMATIQUES DOMICILIAIRES

Mrs. Jeffrey moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 respecting home fire sprinklers / Projet de loi 2, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1992 sur le code du bâtiment en ce qui a trait aux extincteurs automatiques domiciliaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mrs. Jeffrey, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise in the House today in order to present Bill 2. Before I begin my formal remarks, I'd like to acknowledge the attendance this morning of some very special guests, members of the fire service from across Ontario. Thank you for coming.

Every day, these brave men and women put their lives on the line protecting what we value most: our families and our homes. This bill will give these firefighters another tool in their effort to safeguard Ontarians from the danger of fires.

Every 20 minutes, a fire service responds to a fire somewhere in Ontario, ranging from a typical cooking kitchen fire to a full-blown industrial fire. These trained professionals have the equipment, the expertise and the training to meet any challenge. Each year, fire services are called on to respond to over 25,000 fires across Ontario. Professional firefighters have seen first-hand the tragedy families experience when they lose a home or, worse, a loved one. Making residential fire sprinkler systems mandatory in all new residential houses, apartments and condominiums will reduce the number of tragedies.

Last year, a resident of Brampton joined me in the House to show his support for residential sprinklers. In 1999, Mr. Gyamfi lost his daughter in an arson fire in Brampton. He and his family know the terrible pain and devastation fire causes. He chose to come here today again in order to show his support for residential fire sprinklers. Mr. Gyamfi joins us here today in the gallery. Thank you, Mr. Gyamfi.

Our fire service professionals are dedicated people who respond quickly to the call for help. However, even the most well-equipped and quickest-responding team cannot always get to a call in time to save a home or a family. That's where residential fire sprinklers can make

the difference. They can respond to a fire in the early stages and give a family a chance to exit safely while the firefighters are responding to the scene. As many fire professionals know, those precious minutes make the difference. By having sprinklers together with properly functioning smoke alarms, they are 82% more likely to survive a fire relative to having neither.

Some people have questioned the need for mandatory residential fire sprinkler systems. They've argued that the cost will affect home affordability and may cost jobs in the housing sector. I would simply respond that today we spend nearly two thirds of our day in a sprinklered environment, and no one has made an argument that we should not have sprinklers in public places because of costs, or that they cost jobs or cost municipal tax revenues. In our schools, offices, factories, malls, gyms and theatres, we have the benefit of being protected, but in the one place where more incidents of injuries and deaths related to fires occur—our homes—we don't have any sprinkler protection.

This past Sunday evening, the Toronto Fire Service responded to a call at the Fred Victor Mission. A tragic fire cost one person's life, injured five others and left 50 people without a home or their possessions. This three-alarm blaze required 100 firefighters and two dozen trucks. Sadly, this tragedy could have been prevented had a residential fire sprinkler system been installed.

Ontario, unfortunately, has the unenviable distinction of being the only jurisdiction in either Canada or the United States that does not require residential fire sprinklers in high-rise apartments or condominiums. However, we do require them in parking garages and in some lobbies, but not in the units themselves.

Jurisdictions such as Vancouver have a decade of experience with residential fire sprinkler systems. In the 10 years since the city passed a bylaw requiring residential fire sprinklers, there has not been a single accidental fire death in a home equipped with a system. The American experience has confirmed these results. In fact, to my knowledge, there have been no accidental fire deaths occurring in a residence with a properly installed fire sprinkler system in the nearly 200 jurisdictions that require them.

The Ontario public understands the value and importance of fire sprinkler systems. In a poll taken this summer by Polara involving over 1,200 respondents, more than two thirds, 67%, support making them mandatory in new homes and high-rise dwellings. Nearly three quarters, 74%, of those considering buying a new home also support this legislation. Clearly, the public gets it.

This summer, the National Fire Protection Association made a historic decision. The NFPA is an international non-profit organization that serves as the world's leading advocate for fire prevention and is an authoritative source on public safety. Their membership totals more than 79,000 individuals from around the world and more than 80 national trade and professional organizations. This group adopted section 13D requiring the mandatory installation of fire sprinkler systems. "The code provision for sprinklers in new one- and two-family dwellings is a

milestone in fire protection," said James M. Shannon, NFPA president. "It is a significant step in reducing the rate of fire death and injury in the place where people are at most risk for fire—their own homes."

Fire professionals such as the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs want to see this legislation passed not only to save lives and protect property, but also to reduce the number of deaths and injuries suffered by our firefighters responding to these emergencies. Other organizations, such as the Ontario Municipal Fire Prevention Officers Association, the Canadian Automatic Sprinkler Association, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and over 50 municipalities across Ontario, support this effort.

Fires in Ontario are costing our economy hundreds of millions of dollars. More importantly, on average, 100 people lose their lives to fire in Ontario annually.

Unfortunately, in most cases, fires are preventable. Just as we learned the value and importance of smoke alarms in the early 1980s, now is the time to step up to the next level of fire protection. People put entirely too much faith in their smoke alarms. Frequently, they have not been tested and homeowners fail to replace the batteries. One study found that in half the fires involving a fatality, the smoke alarms did not operate because of missing or dead batteries. Smoke alarms do what their name implies: They provide early detection and warning of the smoke from fire. But they take no action on the fire itself. To prevent more deaths and injuries, we need to make meaningful progress in fire protection and safety with an additional intervention. That intervention, already available, is wide-scale installation of fast-response residential fire sprinkler systems.

One key group this proposed legislation stands to protect is individuals who are frequently overlooked, those who need protection the most: our seniors and our disabled. Residential fire sprinklers add a level of protection to seniors and the disabled who choose to live an independent lifestyle. Families who worry about their loved ones forgetting to shut off a stove can now have peace of mind, knowing that their loved ones will have protection that will give them the time to escape safely.

Ontario has a proud record of introducing regulations that protect people from a number of perils. Many of these regulations were adopted with little or no debate because they were the right thing to do.

For example, the Ontario building code regulations, under section 4.1.9, were written to include standards of construction that take into account earthquakes. To my knowledge, no one has died related to an earthquake in Ontario in the past 10 years. Compare this to the over 1,000 deaths and 10,000 injuries attributed to fires during the same time period. We include earthquake protection because we want to protect people and property under a variety of circumstances. It's not an option but a requirement. How can we debate on an issue such as fire safety as an option, when Ontarians are being killed or injured due to preventable fires?

1110

Residential sprinklers save lives, reduce injuries and property damage, and need to be in place today. It's a fire

safety measure whose time has come. Those who want to make Ontario a safer place for themselves and their families should support Bill 2. Shouldn't we be listening and implementing what countless coroners' juries have been recommending for years? Bill 2 simply recognizes something we have known for a long time: sprinklers save lives and property. It's the logical next step, and its time has come. It's the next evolution in building safer and smarter homes. These silent firefighters stand guard 24 hours a day, seven days a week, protecting what we value most: our families and our homes.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank my friend firefighter Brian Maltby. He has been relentless in his determination to see this legislation come to fruition. I know Brian has a dream of a day when firefighters will respond to a fire by running into a house, turning off the water, mopping up the floor and returning safe and sound to their loved ones. Thank you, Brian.

This is a time when we need to demonstrate our commitment to fire safety. We need this bill to pass second reading and to be referred to public hearings so that Ontarians can participate in making this province a national and international leader in fire safety.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'm pleased to stand today and speak to Bill 2, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 respecting home fire sprinklers, put forward by the member from Brampton Centre.

I believe this legislation has great intentions. As a 25-year firefighter, I can say that I think all members want to protect our families and our properties, as well as the firefighters who put their lives on the line each day to help protect us. I, too, want to welcome all the firefighters who are in the audience today to hear the presentations.

As with a lot of things, there is a "but." I don't think that, in this case, enough consideration has really been given to this bill, particularly if we go back. The member introduced Bill 141, which was a similar bill. The only change that was made, from my understanding, is that it now includes that all single dwellings that are going to be built be included in the building code. I think that change is likely larger than the original bill. I don't believe we've had enough consultation and enough discussion with the community that we are asked to protect as to how that should be done or whether it is proper. I believe there is a way of doing that, and that is, the building code needs to be amended. I believe that passing a law to amend the building code to say that any new structure must have a sprinkler system just doesn't cut the mustard. It isn't good enough to not give everyone an opportunity to speak to the issue. As the law now requires, there needs to be a regular review of the building code and I think that's when this should be put forward. As I said, I don't believe the private member's bill, as it presently stands, has had sufficient discussion so we can hear all the pluses and minuses.

Taking shortcuts can end up being more serious for everyone involved, and I believe Bill 2 is a shortcut that would cause more damage than its intended good.

I know the member has done a very good job of putting this together and I want to commend her for it, and she did a good job explaining the positives of the bill. I will focus more on what we see as the problem part of the bill.

The cost of installing fire suppression systems could be prohibitive to builders and homeowners. There have been reports estimating that the cost passed down to a homeowner purchasing a new home with a fire suppression system could be anywhere from \$3,500 to \$4,000 more.

I've also been told that for every \$1,000 increase in the cost of a house, 284 starts will be lost per year, which translates into 1,015 jobs per year, which again can translate into \$20.6 million in government revenue lost per year, and which, going one step further, could find that an estimated \$2.2 million in future realty taxes is lost.

I don't think this decision should be based totally on the financial aspects of it, but I think all those things need to be considered. All those people who will be impacted by those changes need to have a say in what the law will be.

As I said, taking shortcuts has a ripple effect that, even with the best intentions, may not do what they had hoped. I would again suggest that discussions around sprinklers should be part of the building code review.

Incidentally, I've had the opportunity a number of times to be involved in the building code review, and every time I have been involved, sprinklers in residential units has been part of that discussion. The end result at the committees that were studying it has always been that it should not be implemented into the building code, as the pluses and minuses did not balance off.

Another question involves the insurance industry. The cost of insurance for just about everything has gone up, and people are becoming insurance-poor. We have to ask ourselves and the insurance industry whether they are prepared to give families a discount because of the installation of a fire suppression system, or they are going to cover the cost of damages when a fire suppression system isn't properly maintained. Also, will they eventually penalize those in older homes who are not required to install home sprinkler systems? Remember that, according to this bill, only new homes must install the system. Again, if we change the law after that and include other homes, to put them into an existing home becomes very cost-prohibitive.

I know the Ontario home builders remain unconvinced that legislated fire sprinklers are more effective in protecting the health and lives of Ontario homeowners than properly functioning smoke alarms. According to the data collected by the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal, there was a 25% decline in the number of residential fires in Ontario from 1995 to 2002. The Ontario Home Builders' Association believes this is due in part to improved building techniques and materials, as well as mandatory hardwired smoke alarms. There still does not appear to be any data collected on the age of the house where most of the fatal fires occurred.

Despite technological advances, home sprinkler systems will occasionally fail, causing considerable property damage and costly insurance claims. Will that be recovered in the premiums we all pay for our house insurance, or will the insurance company just refuse to cover the cost of a malfunctioning system? There is anecdotal evidence that homebuyers are not interested in home sprinkler systems.

I read with interest one person's comments on a CBC radio call-in show, where this person says—let me read it. It's kind of difficult. It's transcribed from the radio and I can't read what I heard, but it has been transcribed. The reason I want to read it is because some of the things that were said are not things I would say in the Legislature.

"Please keep up the fight to stop this bill. It is the most asinine thing I have ever heard. People are dying in older homes because they have non-functioning smoke detectors. The people pushing this bill like to throw it out that Vancouver has not had a fire death in 10 years since they implemented this policy. Well, if that's the case, apparently the old houses without the sprinkler systems aren't burning either. We are planning on building a new home in 2007"—again, I want to point out that this is not me speaking; this is what the individual said on the CBC—"and the thought of being forced to install this system makes me sick. The water damage of an accidental discharge makes me wonder if my insurance is going to cover the damages.

"There must be more important things these blanketly blanks ... can dither about than this. Please don't let them force this on us. The insurance companies are not supporting this, but are unable to publicly speak out for fear it looks as if they aren't looking after the best interests of the public. The building industry is huge. Band together and stop these fools." That's the end of the presentation on the CBC.

According to the information I received from one leading GTA builder who has offered residential fire sprinklers to 1,069 new homebuyers, not a single buyer has purchased the option. In another example, a prominent builder in Windsor constructed a subdivision with 165 homes, all with residential sprinkler systems included as a standard feature. This builder noted that during the sales process, many purchasers requested a credit toward other upgrades in lieu of the sprinkler system. The purchasers were aware of the benefits of the sprinkler system but they just did not want one.

With building code changes on the horizon, mandatory residential sprinklers could represent the single most expensive change the building industry would face. I believe that if that's what's going to happen, then there's a great need to make sure that our whole communities are involved in that process to make sure that everyone understands what's going in, why it's going in and the benefits that will be derived from it.

1120

The Ontario home builders wrote a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Honourable John Gerretsen, on December 8, 2004, expressing their

concerns and asking for clarification of the government's official position. That wasn't on Bill 2. It was on Bill 141, so it wasn't quite the same; it didn't include the single residential units. The member from Brampton Centre introduced Bill 141. The Ontario Home Builders' Association received a response on January 24, 2005, indicating that the position expressed in Bill 141 was not that of the current government, so I'm to take from that that the government does not support this bill going further.

I believe the same as the member opposite. In this case, since the re-seating, obviously she's not opposite; she's on the same side now. But I believe, as the member does, that we have to do what we can to keep families and those who protect us safe. But I also believe that there needs to be a lot more discussion before something as important as this becomes law. Cutting corners and fast-tracking are not the answer.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to what I think is a very important initiative. I want to commend the member for Brampton Centre, Linda Jeffrey, for bringing this forward again. She's very determined to make sure that we deal with this issue because it's an issue that I think all of us are very passionate about. In fact, our caucus is so passionate about it—I can only speak for three minutes; don't let that be any indication of how strongly I feel about this, because a number of members want to speak in support of this bill. I look forward to putting my three minutes' worth in.

I'm not new to this issue. Back in my days at the city of Toronto as chair of the community services committee, I joined then-Fire Chief Alan Speed in launching our war on fire. One of the significant recommendations in that initiative was an effort to bring about mandatory sprinkler systems. I see that Chief Speed is here with us today, and I'd like to acknowledge his many years of working toward seeing this initiative go through, as well as many years of working on other initiatives that have saved numerous lives, not only in the city of Toronto and Ontario but probably throughout North America. He really has done fantastic work and continues to, and I thank him for that.

In my own community of Toronto, since amalgamation, we've lost 140 residents to fires. A hundred people, on average, die each year as a result of fires across the province. These people have families, they have friends; they're people who could have been saved otherwise with initiatives such as mandatory sprinkler systems.

There are concerns that have been raised about damage that may be created by sprinkler systems if they go off. I think people have to start dealing with the facts here. It's not like in the movies, where you see hundreds of sprinklers going off. These are very sensitive pieces of technology where, when there is a fire, they only go off over that one area where the fire is and, generally speaking, only one or two of them would go off in that area in a highly concentrated way. In fact, in terms of accident-

ally going off, it hardly ever happens. I think it's one in 16 million sprinklers that will be defective, which is really never. It really is a bogus argument to suggest that these sprinkler systems are going to go off and create all kinds of damage.

I also have noticed that joining us today is Fire Chief Bill Stewart, the fire chief for the city of Toronto. I know Chief Stewart is passionate about saving lives. That's why he's dedicated his entire life to fighting fires. He has said to me on more than a few occasions that there's nothing we can do to save lives more effectively than a mandatory sprinkler program in the province of Ontario in new housing. I agree with him.

When it comes to experts on these things, there's nobody I respect more than Chiefs Alan Speed and Bill Stewart. I agree with them. They're suggesting we move forward on this initiative, and I certainly share with them my support for their efforts in the past and the present and the efforts of our colleague here in bringing forward what I think will be a very important piece of legislation.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I too am pleased to join in the debate regarding the bill brought forward by the member from Brampton Centre, Bill 2, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 respecting home sprinklers.

There is no question that fire has many tragic consequences, including injury, property damage, loss and sometimes even death. As lawmakers, I think we all stand united in our desire to find ways to reduce deaths from fire. The question we are looking at today, though, is whether mandatory sprinklers in new residential construction is the best route to follow. The member from Oxford has articulated quite well some of the concerns that are out there.

We know that smoke alarms save lives. We know that new homes are built in a much safer way than older homes because of changing building code requirements. The number of deaths attributable to fire in one- and two-family homes is on the decline. We know that sprinklers can save property, but do we know that we need them in new homes as a way to save lives?

Looking at some statistics compiled by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp., we can see that there are some groups that seem to have a higher risk level for fire-related deaths. First Nation communities, rooming houses, rural communities and mobile homes all have higher risk levels. The bill would not really change their circumstances or their risks. Perhaps part of the risk faced by these people could be reduced by studying ways to improve smoke detector usage in existing older homes and rooming houses.

This bill calls for the use of sprinkler systems in new homes. This is a costly plan that will add to the purchase price, making it that much more difficult for people to afford to buy new homes. It will mean lost jobs in the housing sector as well. We don't have the figures to show us whether fire deaths have been occurring in older or new homes, yet we are contemplating a plan that might be directed at the wrong target: new homes. If the bill

were narrower in scope and did not include new house construction, I would have an easier time supporting it.

Before I finish my comments—and I know some other members of my party would like to speak—I'd like to take a moment to remind people on both sides of the House of the important role that firefighters play in our lives today and to thank all the firefighters who are present here today in the Legislature.

As pointed out by my colleague from Waterloo-Wellington yesterday, having firefighters available to respond to a blaze is surely the best protection we have in our communities. I know first-hand about the impact this has had on our rural communities, and I fully support his efforts. My own riding has been hit hard, and local fire services have lost the help and assistance of over 15 volunteers in the city of Kawartha Lakes alone. Double-hat firefighter play a vital role in small communities across the province, and the current union action to curtail the legitimate volunteer activities of their membership has had a significant impact on fire services. We need the expertise these volunteers bring, and we value their willingness to use their skills to protect their neighbours. Having a firefighter available to respond to a fire is the best protection of all.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I stand in support of this bill, as I did last year—was it last year or two years ago?

I want to commend the member from Brampton Centre. She is a bulldog, and I say that from East York, because the symbol of East York is a bulldog: tenacious and unrelenting and just won't give up and is loyal to the end. That was the symbol of East York, and I think it should also be the symbol for the member from Brampton Centre.

She has seized upon an idea whose time has truly come and perhaps should have come before. I don't know why this did not pass the last time. It certainly had all-party support in this Legislature. But unfortunately, like so many private members' bills, it died on the order paper with prorogation.

This is the second time, and she's taken the opportunity over this last period of time, between the debate on the first attempt and today, to actually improve the bill. The bill is a much better bill today even than it was then, because it now includes condominiums and apartments. It has expanded to the full range of new development that may take place in Ontario.

Many people have already spoken, and I think the statistics speak for themselves. This is going to go into new homes, and I commend that all of the new homes in this province should be as safe as they possibly can be.

There was a time, not that many years ago, when people started to notice that a great many of the cars that were on the highway were not particularly safe. Through crash tests and other tests that the automotive industry and various levels of government did, it was determined which cars were not as safe as others. Certainly what has happened is that those cars which were deemed to be unsafe are no longer on the road. When people go out to

buy a car today, they look at how safe that car is likely to be in terms of seat belts, air bags or crash test worthiness. They look at those kinds of things.

1130

People who are buying a house are no different. They want to buy a house, a home, a place where they're going to live, a condominium, an apartment that is totally safe. We have an obligation as a provincial government to do exactly the kinds of things we did around automobiles all those many years ago. Certainly today, no one would go out and buy a car, no one would market a car and no one would be allowed to sell a car that was unsafe. But today in the province of Ontario, we are the last jurisdiction in North America that does not allow for sprinklering of properties and new properties. That seems to me to be kind of bizarre. If we are going to save hundreds of lives and deem it our duty to do so on the roads of this province—and it's a good duty and it's something we need to do—why are we going to say that losing your life in a fire is any less important, any less relevant? If we can save one life, never mind hundreds of lives, by doing this, surely it is something we should do.

There are those who will balk at the cost. How much is this going to cost on a new home? One per cent of the price? I doubt that. Half a per cent? Sure, it's going to cost a little bit of money, but it costs money if you want the proper goods and services to be produced. I will tell every person who balks at that cost or every person who speaks against the \$1,000, \$2,000, \$5,000 or whatever it is that it costs to install the system in their particular unit that on the day a fire starts in that unit, they are going to think that that was the best investment they could possibly ever have made in their lives. They are going to know they did the right thing. Not only they, but their friends and neighbours, if they live in an apartment or a condominium, are going to be thankful that even if the fire did not originate with them, that will make it virtually impossible for the fire to spread to them.

So I want to commend the member from Brampton Centre. I want to say that she has done the right thing.

I also want to commend the men and women in uniform here today, those who have come down to support this bill and who in fact support our communities each and every day. There is a large contingent here from my city of Toronto—I think even some who lived and worked in the former borough of East York all those years ago when I was mayor. I have nothing but the highest admiration for the men and women who risk their lives every day. I ask members to think about the risk to the lives of these people. When they get to a house after four or five minutes, six minutes, it's just about the time of the flashpoint. Without a sprinkler, that fire is going to be more advanced, it's going to be hotter, and it's going to be more dangerous to all of you. With a sprinkler, it's going to be less advanced, less hot and less dangerous to all of you.

Firefighting is a dangerous profession. I want to know that we in this province are doing our bit to help them, to make sure they have a better chance of fighting the fire

and saving lives, but also a better chance of returning home to their loved ones each and every day. It is time for this fire safety bill to be passed.

I would be remiss, and I would not be the opportunist that I am, if I did not talk about my own bill that also died on the order paper last year, because I think it is a companion piece. It's something that I think maybe could be, in committee, incorporated into this bill, or, if the government sees fit and wants to bring forward an omnibus bill dealing with fire as a result of what is being said, then the government could do that as well.

Last year I introduced a piece which was not for new homes. It's not somewhere new to go, but it was something to deal with older homes, because in this province we have many buildings that are 50 years old, 60 years old, even some that are more than 100 years of age, and they do not have adequate fire standards in them. I know it would be cost-prohibitive to take the apartments, the condominiums and the homes that are more than 50 years old and force people to start making major renovations to put in sprinklers. I know that. But my bill was very simple. It was to make sure that in apartment buildings two things happened. Number one is that all of the apartments were co-linked so that when the alarm went off in one apartment, people in another apartment down the hall would be notified that an alarm had been sounded and that there would be a pull system to ensure that the alarm would be sounded throughout the building, so that people would not suddenly discover a fire that was well advanced in one unit coming in and really doing damage to them. That was the first provision.

The second one is to me such a no-brainer. I cannot believe we are still one of the only jurisdictions in North America that allows wooden fire escapes. I want you to think about that: We allow wooden fire escapes in this province. That means, for a person fleeing for their life in a rooming house, a home or an apartment building, the only avenue of escape is down the fire escape, and the fire escape itself is on fire. In this province, we allow that.

My bill would have given the construction industry and the people who own apartments, homes and rooming houses where there are multiple people living in a unit, time to put in a non-combustible fire escape, be that cement, metal or something that would not burn. Quite frankly, we cannot cut off an avenue that someone has to escape. We have to give a person who is at risk every opportunity to get out. We have to give the firefighters, as well, every opportunity to get in.

In the fire in question which did this—and I have the coroner's report here. It's the Report on the Inquest into the Deaths of Linda Elderkin and Paul Benson, and it's dated October 2001. It was prepared by the Office of the Chief Coroner in Toronto. It was a fire that took place in my own riding of Beaches—East York on Queen Street in the Beach. Those two people died, and the coroner's jury came to the conclusion that two things were wrong: (1) there wasn't an interconnected; and (2) the only avenue

they had of escape was down a burning fire escape, and the firefighters could not get up that same burning fire escape to get to them to rescue them.

I'm suggesting that there is a lot that needs to be done in Ontario; there is an awful lot that needs to be done. This bill is a good start for new homes. I am suggesting that when the time comes—and I intend to reintroduce my bill because it too died on the order paper with prorogation—that we include Bill 2, or perhaps have it included, if this is going to be fast-tracked—because my turn won't come up until 2007—at the time that we go to committee. It is simply not acceptable that people in Ontario are at some kind of risk.

My own bill was passed by all members here in the Legislature. It got, I think, a couple of lines in the Toronto Sun here in Toronto, and I think that's all that the press in Ontario covered on that particular bill. It was front-page news, though, in the Vancouver Sun. It was front-page news that Ontario was considering having a bill to stop wooden fire escapes. But they had it on the front page because they were mocking us. They were saying that they couldn't believe that a place like Ontario allowed wooden fire escapes, which have been banned in British Columbia for half a century; that Ontario still has a private member's bill and still allows wooden fire escapes.

I say that because everyone is watching. We are the last jurisdiction in North America that does not have a sprinkler system in individual residences. Yes, we have them in halls and, yes, we have them sometimes in the family rooms of major condominiums or in the party rooms. We have them in a couple of places like that, but we don't have them where the majority of fires start. We don't have, quite frankly, adequate legislation dealing with safety when it comes to older buildings.

I commend the member, I commend the firefighters, and I commend everyone who has spoken in favour of this bill. I'm sure that this is going to pass unanimously here today. But the real question will not be whether this bill passes in this Legislature today on second reading; it will be what happens to it after today. All too often, what happens with private members' bills is that everybody's happy and we all walk out of here and then it goes to committee, and the committee never calls the bill. It never goes to public hearings. It never gets an opportunity to be reintroduced at third reading. Someone at third reading will stand up and generally say no when it's asked if it is going to proceed unanimously, or, in the alternative, some kind of deal will be made between the House leaders about which bills are allowed to go forward and which ones are not allowed to go forward, and the whole thing ends up dying.

1140

The member from Brampton Centre, as I said at the beginning, is to be commended, because she's not willing to let the concept over which she has fought so long and so hard die. I want to assure the House that I am not about to let my bill die, either. When my turn comes up, as it will in the early spring of 2007, I intend to put the

same bill back before this Legislature. I know that it may or may not pass again on that occasion, and it may or may not be referred to committee. But I would hope that the idea needs to go beyond this. It needs to go to cabinet. The cabinet and House leader need to understand that this legislator is committed to saving lives. We know that lives can be saved. Just the same way that we know that seat belts save lives in cars, we will know that sprinklers will save lives in new condominiums, apartments and homes. We need to impress upon them that this is not a partisan issue. This is an issue that, if the government saw fit to do it in their own bill, would probably pass without debate, or certainly with no more debate than we're giving here today. It is a bill that would be very easy for the cabinet to bring forward. It would be a bill that would not engender any kind of hostility in this House and would probably pass within an absolute modicum of time.

That is where I think we're coming from here on this. I am asking the government—when I say “the government,” I mean not just the Liberal Party but the executive council—to have the same commitment to fire safety and saving lives that the members who are here and who have spoken today have on this issue. Clearly, this is a responsibility which cannot be shirked by us. It is a responsibility that we must take seriously.

The firefighters are giving up their very valuable time. There are giving of their expertise. They have told us how little this is going to cost. They have told us how it's going to save lives. The insurance industry has even told us that the sprinkler system can cut the average cost down to \$1,000 from \$15,000 for fire damage. Even they have to be happy. The homeowners who pay the insurance are going to, in the end, save money on this.

I don't see that there is anything wrong with this bill. I am asking that everyone vote for it today, but more importantly, I'm asking for all members in this House, when you see a member of the executive council—cabinet—tell them that this bill is one that needs to be rushed through.

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): It's always a pleasure to speak after my good friend and colleague from Beaches-East York. Michael Prue is always passionate about fire safety.

I want to congratulate the member from Brampton Centre, Linda Jeffrey, for two things: certainly for Bill 2, which I'm going to speak on, but as well for her recent appointment as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. It's well-deserved. Congratulations.

It's a shame that the public can't see the entirety of this House. It is truly impressive to see all the representatives we have from across Ontario who are here on behalf of the bill, many of them dressed in their uniforms. In the two years that I've been here as a new MPP, I think this is one of the most impressive days I have seen. I thank all of you for taking the time to come out to support Linda's bill.

I want to recognize some people from my area who have taken the time to come out here: Fire Chiefs Ken Eden and Jo Zambito from Niagara-on-the-Lake. Thank you for coming out. I know there is a fire chief from the town of Fort Erie, Jim Douglas, here as well, so thank you.

One individual who was not able to attend but who certainly wanted to be here was our fire chief from the city of Niagara Falls, Patrick Burke, whom we are fortunate to have and who I know is respected throughout all of Ontario as a fire chief. I want to read Patrick's—we affectionately call him Pat—remarks into Hansard today. Pat has indicated to me that he would like to say to the House and to everyone across Ontario that he knows “the issue of residential sprinklers will be discussed in the House today.

“As chief of the Niagara Falls Fire Department, I can advise you that I fully support residential sprinkler legislation. Sprinklers have saved many lives and much damage over the years by extinguishing fires in their early stage, or by holding fires in check until the arrival of the fire department. A prime example of the effectiveness of sprinklers is the city of Vancouver, where a residential sprinkler bylaw significantly contributed to the fact that there were zero fire deaths in Vancouver in the year 2004. This is an amazing statistic given the size and complexity of that city. We have had recent examples in Richmond, BC, and Toronto where sprinklers may have made the difference in preventing three deaths.

“I hope that you will support the legislation being proposed. It will enhance the safety of many Ontario citizens.”

Again, it's from our chief, Patrick Burke, Niagara Falls.

This is a wonderful bill. I am confident and I always remain positive. I've been here two years, and there are days you sometimes think that it's a slow House, that it's difficult to get things through, but I remain positive that this bill is going to get through, that it's going to be supported. I hear the opposition has concerns over it. I'm sure we'll bring them in line to share with them that lives are more important than dollars and cents, and that will take this bill forward. So thank you. I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on Bill 2, which, as everyone obviously knows, was Bill 141 in the past, with some changes.

I know there has been quite a bit of debate and stats on all sides of this issue, and although I'm not really buying into either side of it, what I'm looking at is that what I will try to bring forward will be somewhat different. Firefighters, as everybody here has agreed, have a very honourable tradition. They work hard in our communities and do a great job. I know they're the first ones to respond. I think some of the other areas that could be focused on are the 1710 and 1720 issues that were brought forward because I see a large number of concerns in this area.

If you look at the public sector, they always seem to jump on things that are very beneficial to society and something that society buys into. That's why you see the guy from Canadian Tire pushing the smoke alarms and everything else. But where's the guy from Canadian Tire pushing home sprinkler systems? I don't see the demand there. I don't see the public buying into this as something they really feel is necessary in their community and their homes. Quite frankly, how can you put anything of value on somebody's life when these sorts of things come forward? By the same token, I grew up with a lot of firefighters. A lot of firefighters were my friends before I became elected and a lot more firefighters are my friends now since being elected, but I don't know one that has a home sprinkler system in their house right now. That speaks a lot for it on its own, when you're looking at this issue.

There are a lot of areas of concern that I look at. I have a lot of rural residents, such as up at my father's property. Where he lives, he's got power outages for three and four days. I know the member from last time on Bill 141, Mr. Bisson, spoke on this issue and talked about a community that lost the entire school because of a malfunction—it froze and broke. What are you going to do in communities where there's no hydro and no pressurized water, things like that?

I certainly hope that if this issue comes to committee we get a full opportunity, that we can hear from insurance people, because I believe in the end it will cost more to have it in place than it is at the start. I think it should be given the opportunity at that time.

1150

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It certainly is a pleasure to join in the debate and to be able to extend my welcome to the men and women in our fire services who put their lives on the line every day.

Other speakers before me have said that this simply is a bill whose time has come. I agree with that wholeheartedly. It's important to be clear about this bill: We're not talking about going back and having to retrofit older homes. What we're saying is that every home in Ontario that is built from this point on, should this bill pass, would have a fire sprinkler system in it.

I think you have to ask, whom do you take your advice from on fire protection? I take it from the men and women who have shown up today in uniform who practise that on a daily basis. They are the people we should be taking advice from. They are the people who are providing us with the advice that this would be a tremendous move forward, were we able to do that.

If you didn't want to take advice from those people, there are some other people who have joined us in the gallery today. There are some young people here. If you said to those young people, "Were you to start to build a new house today, what would be some of the most important things you would put in that house?" I think that surely those young people would agree with us that a device that would protect against the spread of fire in a

house would be something that would be very high on their priority list.

I think that from the very old to the very experienced to the very young in our society, most people, from a common sense perspective, would agree that this is a bill whose time has come and that we need to find a way to make it happen.

The member from Brampton certainly deserves credit for bringing the bill back. I think she has alluded to the fact and spoken to the fact that she has made some improvements to the bill in order to gain even more support.

It is a very sensible approach to what is a very serious problem, and it applies to new housing only. When you compare some of the types of appliances that are offered today in new homes, things like dishwashers and microwaves and granite counters and landscape lighting and lawn sprinklers, why would you not start to install fire protection? It just seems to make sense to me, and I think it's going to make sense to a lot of members in this House.

Take a look at the experience of the city of Vancouver, and take a look at the experience of over 200 North American jurisdictions that have decided that fire sprinklers are the way to go. Ontario citizens, I believe, deserve the same protection, which would be afforded under this bill, were it to pass, that currently other members of North American society enjoy.

Of 100 deaths in Ontario in 2003, 87% of those deaths took place in people's homes; not in their businesses, not in vehicles, but right in the place where they're supposed to feel the safest, right in their own homes.

I want to tell you about a situation that maybe drives the point home a little bit and maybe helps us all to understand what types of decisions people who are employed professionally in our fire services have to deal with on a daily basis. It is an incident that took place in Oakville in 1998.

On August 15, the fire department in Oakville received a call at 4:01 from a lady who said, "I have a fire in my house," and then the line went dead. By 4:05, the trucks were on the scene. The police officer who had attended could hear the people in the house. The fire protection personnel who were there were unable to rescue the people from the house, even though they knew, when they were on the perimeter of the scene, that there were people who were still alive in that house. By the time 4:18 came along, they had two bodies on the front lawn. By the time 4:28 came along, they had two more bodies. They were able to perform CPR and revive each one of those individuals, three children and a mother, and they sent them to local hospitals. They all died within 36 hours. They didn't die from fire; they died from the effects of smoke inhalation.

It seems to me that what the member from Brampton is presenting to us today is a way to prevent that type of circumstance from ever happening again. It deserves the support, I think, of every member of this House.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I also applaud the member for Brampton Centre for this

bill. I'm pleased to see representatives from the fire services and others here today.

In an earlier life at Loyalist College I taught night courses to individuals from fire services. They were a very tough crowd to teach, because they weren't there in the evening to get a credit or to get an evening away from home; they were passionate about what they were doing. Their questions were sometimes very difficult and challenging, but they were passionate about it, and I have a great deal of admiration.

What I have learned in life, folks, is that everything costs too much. I remember when we were talking about putting seat belts in cars, and that they cost too much. It was absolutely ridiculous to consider that and to make people put it on. How many lives have been saved by seat belts in this world? I don't know; thousands, maybe a million. When they came up with the concept of air bags, they were way too much money. There's no way, and it would be unfair to the public to have to pay for air bags. How many lives have they saved?

I remember when smoke detectors first came out, and they were way too much money for the number of lives they were going to save. There was opposition from various groups saying, "Smoke detectors are too much money." Builders said, "We don't want to have to bear the cost and pass it on to the public, because if we add a smoke detector, they won't be able to afford the house." How many lives have smoke detectors saved? We'll never know.

Now we're at another milestone in history, one which says we have the opportunity to do something that will save people's lives. I'm somewhat surprised at some of the discussion. If you think that these sprinklers cause water damage, you go into a house that's had a full-fledged blaze and see the water damage. I suspect, for a house that may be short of water in a rural area, then they're short of water for a full-fledged fire, and it takes an awful lot less water with a sprinkler system than it does to bring in the trucks and put it out.

These are not high-tech systems; these are relatively simple, relatively maintenance-free. You don't have to be awake; you don't have to hear them go off; you don't even have to be in the home for them to activate and save your house. Smoke detectors—we have the problem of batteries. Whenever I cook, ours goes off and it's tempting to pull that battery out, and I have to remember that at my age I won't remember to put it back in, so we'll just leave that battery in there and put up with the noise for a few minutes. My wife is hearing impaired. She has difficulty hearing the smoke detectors go off, but she wouldn't have difficulty with a sprinkler.

Here is the last thing: The worst thing you'll ever have in life is to live with "what if." If you've ever lost a loved one, you will spend the rest of your life, if the circumstances were preventable, saying, "What if?" I know people who say, "What if? What if I'd gotten to the hospital sooner? What if I'd had the battery in the smoke detector? What if I'd done this or done that?" If putting this system in your home or building avoids you having

to live every day the rest of your life with, "What if I'd had a sprinkler system in the home?" then it's worth every penny. If it saves one life in Ontario, then this bill has served its purpose and it's worth the money.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Brampton Centre, you have two minutes to reply.

Mrs. Jeffrey: I'd like to thank the members from Scarborough Centre, Niagara Falls, Oakville, Prince Edward-Hastings, Oxford, Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, Beaches-East York and Oshawa. What an interesting group of speakers they were this morning.

I wanted to sum up, in the short time I have available, to focus on three messages. What I'd like people to think about this morning after this debate is: This bill is designed to protect what we value the most. We have a collective responsibility to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians. We know that sprinklers complement the early-warning capability of smoke alarms by adding fire suppression. We need to encourage and educate consumers about residential fires. Our future depends on it. We need to embrace this proven technology to protect all Ontarians.

Last year we lost over 100 people. These people were our mothers, our fathers and our children. Over time, we've lost heroes in our community: firefighters. We need to ensure that the risk for future and current firefighters is minimized.

I'd like to invite all members of the House to come out and visit the Toronto Fire Services sprinkler trailer which is outside in front of the Legislature today for an hour. Come out and see how effective and how quick-acting they are. It's a wonderful little demonstration tool that we have the loan of this afternoon.

The best time to include residential sprinklers in the building code would have been 25 years ago; the second-best time for this Legislature to make a decision that would protect all Ontarians is today. I would appreciate your support of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

HEALTH INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (PSA TESTS FOR PROSTATE CANCER), 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ (TEST PSA POUR LE DÉPISTAGE DU CANCER DE LA PROSTATE)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 5, standing in the name of Mr. Mauro.

Mr. Mauro has moved second reading of Bill 4, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members for a vote on this after we deal with the next item.

HOME FIRE SPRINKLER ACT, 2005
LOI DE 2005 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS
AUTOMATIQUES DOMICILIAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 6, standing in the name of Mrs. Jeffrey.

Mrs. Jeffrey has moved second reading of Bill 2, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 respecting home fire sprinklers. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members for this. Call in the members. I remind them that this will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1159 to 1204.

HEALTH INSURANCE
AMENDMENT ACT (PSA TESTS FOR
PROSTATE CANCER), 2005
LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ
(TEST PSA POUR LE DÉPISTAGE
DU CANCER DE LA PROSTATE)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Mauro has moved second reading of Bill 4. All those in favour, please stand.

Ayes
Arthurs, Wayne
Baird, John R.
Bartolucci, Rick
Bryant, Michael
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Duguid, Brad
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Hudak, Tim
Jeffrey, Linda
Klees, Frank
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Miller, Norm
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Parsons, Ernie
Prue, Michael
Qaadri, Shafiq
Colle, Mike
Racco, Mario G.
Smith, Monique
Tascona, Joseph N.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please stand.

Nays
Amott, Ted

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 33; the nays are 1.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion passed.

Pursuant to standing order 96, this bill will be referred to the committee of the whole—

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): The standing committee on justice policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Mauro has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on justice policy.

Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: We're having a vote here.

Agreed? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The majority has voted in favour.

It will be referred to the standing committee on justice policy.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Given the strong support for this bill, I would ask that we give unanimous consent to have third reading of this bill immediately so that the government can deal with it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We can give unanimous consent to order the bill for third reading, but we cannot give it passage here.

Agreed? I heard a no.

The doors will now be open for 30 seconds before we take the vote on the next issue.

HOME FIRE SPRINKLER ACT, 2005
LOI DE 2005 SUR LES EXTINCTEURS
AUTOMATIQUES DOMICILIAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Jeffrey has moved second reading of Bill 2. All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Jeffrey, Linda	Parsons, Ernie
Arthurs, Wayne	Arthurs, Wayne	Prue, Michael
Bartolucci, Rick	Bartolucci, Rick	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Bryant, Michael	Racco, Mario G.
Colle, Mike	Colle, Mike	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Craitor, Kim	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Duguid, Brad	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Hardeman, Ernie	McNeely, Phil	
Hoy, Pat	Miller, Norm	
Hudak, Tim	Milloy, John	
	Mitchell, Carol	
	Ouellette, Jerry J.	
	Parsons, Ernie	
	Prue, Michael	
	Qaadri, Shafiq	
	Racco, Mario G.	
	Smith, Monique	
	Van Bommel, Maria	
	Wilkinson, John	
	Zimmer, David	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

Nays

Baird, John R.	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 26; the nays are 8.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to have this bill ordered for third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? I heard a no.

Pursuant to standing order 96, this bill is referred to the committee of the whole House—

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): Mr. Speaker, could I have it referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs. Jeffrey has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. Agreed? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please stand.

All those opposed, please stand.

A majority being in favour, it is referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1212 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VETERANS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's truly an honour for me to be here today and to introduce some folks who are in the Speaker's gallery. We have with us five veterans of World War II, all from the riding of Simcoe North and all great people in their communities: Bernie Levesque, Bruce Gilbert, Roy Shakell, William Smith and Vern Sweeting, who is here with his son, Tom Sweeting, who happens to be the special budget adviser at the Ministry of Finance. We also have with us today Deputy Mayor Jim Downer of the town of Midland. Jim also has a connection with Queen's Park: Jim's uncle, Reverend Wally Downer, was a member here for over 30 years.

I also want to point out today, with Jim in attendance from the town of Midland, that the town of Midland initiated a movement throughout the province of Ontario, and indeed throughout the country, to allow veterans who have veterans' licence plates—those are the plates with the poppies on them—to have free parking in municipalities. A number of municipalities across our province, and I believe across our country now, are initiating this movement.

Although there will be more time later on for our tribute to veterans, it's really special that I am able to enjoy this afternoon with these folks. They're great members of our community, and it's an honour for me to have them here with me today.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): On this exciting day when we are talking about conservation, I'm pleased to stand here and tell you about the great initiative underway at the University of Ottawa biology building. This 56,000-square-foot research and teaching facility is a great example of how exceptionally energy-efficient buildings can be. After looking at the myriad of ways that energy efficiency can be incorporated into

building design, the design team devised four distinct innovations: first, high-performance window glazing, extra-wide thermal breaks and an added layer of insulation; second, a cooling system that dehumidifies air at the central unit and circulates this air throughout; third, growth chambers that enable the recovery of waste heat; and fourth, fume hoods that are energy-efficient, functional and safe.

The University of Ottawa biology building will consume a remarkable 73% less energy than a traditionally equipped building. This translates into \$270,000 of estimated annual cost savings. To accompany this unique building design, a courtyard classroom will also be developed, recreating a boreal forest and wetland environment to further the hands-on learning of students at the University of Ottawa. This building is an example of how energy efficiency and conservation should be incorporated into the design and planning of our universities. I wish to congratulate the University of Ottawa for their wonderful conservation methods.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): The people of Guelph are proud that they were pioneers in recycling as the first municipality to introduce a roadside blue box program. Today we are proud to lead the energy conservation movement. Guelph Hydro is leading the way by generating electricity from the methane reserves from the Eastview landfill. Both the University of Guelph and the Upper Grand District School Board have embarked on projects which will reduce energy consumption. The Upper Grand District School Board hosted a conference last April titled Energy W.I.S.E. (We're Into Saving Energy), with keynote speaker Dr. David Suzuki. The board recognizes the importance of educating their staff, students and the community about energy conservation and about changing behaviour toward conservation.

That is why I am proud that our government, through the Ministry of Education, is putting the study of environmental issues such as conservation right in the curriculum in every grade. For example, grade 7 students learn the importance of renewable and non-renewable resources. In grade 12, there are two courses on environment and resource management that are devoted to conservation.

It is our students who will work for change in the future. Our government is ensuring that they are well prepared for that responsibility.

BY-ELECTION IN SCARBOROUGH–ROUGE RIVER

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Dalton McGuinty is missing in action again: That's what the good people of Scarborough–Rouge River are saying as they prepare for a by-election on November 25.

John Tory has been front and centre with the PC Party candidate, Cynthia Lai, who is working hard to become the MPP for the Scarborough–Rouge River riding. John Tory and the PC caucus are proud of Cynthia Lai's can-

didacy—a successful business person, the first Chinese female president of the Toronto Real Estate Board, and an active community leader.

Cynthia Lai is also proud of John Tory, who has a reputation of integrity and honesty, and Cynthia Lai takes every opportunity to introduce John Tory to her constituents and to speak about his leadership qualities.

Not so the Liberal candidate, who to date has done everything possible to hide the fact that he is aligning himself with the prince of broken promises: not one picture or reference to his leader, Dalton McGuinty, in his literature; no sign or mention of this promise-breaker on his Web site. Could it be that the Liberal candidate wants to hide the very leader who used his authority to crown him as candidate and wants to separate himself from the McGuinty legacy of broken promises?

Cynthia Lai, the PC candidate in Scarborough–Rouge River, was democratically elected as candidate and stands proudly with John Tory in her fight for safer communities, lower energy costs and improved quality of life for the constituents of Scarborough–Rouge River. She'll serve her constituents and our province well as the next MPP for Scarborough–Rouge River.

RIDEShare

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Each year, 28 volunteer drivers from Sudbury's RideShare program provide 13,000 rides to low-income or isolated families who have no other means of getting their children to medical appointments, therapy or daycare programs. The main source of this funding for the program has been through the Ontario Early Years challenge fund, and that funding is due to end in March 2006. If other financing isn't found, 65% of RideShare's clients—some 230 families—will lose this vital transportation support altogether.

The MacNeil family might be one of these. They and 27 other families need RideShare to transport their autistic and special-needs children to therapy. Three times a week, Paula uses RideShare to get her four-year-old daughter to her IBI treatment in Copper Cliff. In fact, three of the four children who access IBI treatment in Copper Cliff rely on RideShare to get them there and home again. This has created a strong bond between these autistic children, their parents and their drivers. More importantly, RideShare has made it possible for them to receive the IBI treatment that they so desperately need.

RideShare is a valuable community service which needs to be maintained and enhanced. For the sake of these autistic children, other special needs children and other families who need transportation to medical appointments, therapy and child care, I urge this government to find a source of funding for RideShare.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): As winter and colder weather come closer, we want to ensure that Ontarians do everything they can do to conserve energy. Our government has taken a leadership role in providing low-income Ontarians with resources to do just that.

We are piloting a Conserving Homes project in approximately 100 homes in the city of Brantford. This pilot project will be providing both education and energy efficiency measures to low-income residents in my riding. The Conserving Homes program is run through a partnership between Brantford Power and Share the Warmth. Some funding for the program is coming from the Ministry of Energy.

In December of 2004, the Ontario Energy Board approved Brantford Power's conservation and demand management plan, which included the development of low-income energy efficiency programs in co-operation with Share the Warmth. In its decision approving this plan, the OEB made special note of this co-operative program and encouraged other local electricity distribution companies to adopt it. Congratulations to Brantford Power.

We know how important it is to combine conservation with energy efficiency measures to make the best use of energy resources available in Ontario. Our government has worked and is continuing to work toward the best uses of energy in this province.

The co-operation between the city of Brantford, Share the Warmth and the provincial government is something that I'm very proud of, and I know we all should be. I particularly want to thank the CEO of Brantford Power, George Mychailenko, his staff and the board members for their contribution toward this wonderful project that is helping those who need it the most.

1340

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Members' statements?

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): Today is a great day. It's a great day because the McGuinty government and our new Minister of Energy and conservation is taking further action to counter the 13 lost years of energy policy that we suffered under the previous Tory and NDP governments.

I want to set the record straight. I know the leader of the third party likes to talk about conservation, but I think the members of this House should be reminded of his record when he sat at the cabinet table. His record was to make a short-term decision to cancel every real conservation program in the province. The NDP cancelled every real conservation program. If those conservation measures hadn't been cancelled, we'd see generation savings of 5,200 megawatts today. That's roughly the equivalent of being able to take every unit at Darlington and Pickering offline.

As for the Tories, their record is equally invisible. Everyone knows that there were no conservation initiatives attempted under the Harris-Eves government, and

things have not changed. We've heard Mr. Tory talk about coal, but what we haven't heard him talk about is "conservation," "renewables," "green," "smart meters," "demand management," "energy efficiency" or "energy efficient"—we haven't heard those words. The fact that we haven't heard that conversation coming from the other side of the House means we know where his priorities lie.

While we're talking about records, I'd like to extend a warm thank you to John Baird, who devoted an entire column in today's Ottawa Citizen toward explaining how good the deal is that the McGuinty government recently signed with Bruce Power to bring on-line another 1,500 megawatts. In his own words, the member for Nepean-Carleton said, "It just"—

The Speaker: Thank you.

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I have to tell you that I was truly shocked and very, very disappointed to learn yesterday that the federal Tory party is taking all steps necessary to throw a wrench into plans to boost the flow of federal dollars to expand Ontario's immigrant settlement programs.

Our government is working hard, in partnership with the federal government, to ensure that new Canadians get the best possible start here in Ontario. Harper's Tories, meanwhile, can't see the value in those investments, which will ensure that immigrants are able to integrate and contribute to our society as quickly as possible.

Ontario is the only province not to have an immigration agreement with the federal government, and it is time to close that gap.

Sadly, this division between the federal Tories and the government, federally, spills over into provincial politics here. I know that the member for Nepean-Carleton and the member for Whitby-Ajax are both working very hard to join their federal cousins on Parliament Hill after the next federal election, so I am urging them today to get on side here and lobby their federal counterparts to stop the antics which are causing unnecessary hardship for new Canadians here in Ontario.

Stephen Harper says he wants to stand up for Canada. This government happens to believe that standing up for Canada means standing up for Ontario, and also standing up for new Canadians. That's something that the Tories have to remember.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I want to bring to members' attention—we had Charles Beer, the member from York North in the 34th and 35th Parliament. He came to visit.

Oh, there he is. He's behind the post.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): On Tuesday, November 1, 2005, the member for Waterloo-Wellington raised a point of order respecting the appropriateness of a statement made by the member for Guelph-Wellington on Monday, October 31, 2005, during members' statements. The member for Guelph-Wellington also spoke to the point of order.

Let me begin by saying that such points can only be effectively dealt with if they are raised at the time of the alleged transgression. It is not possible for the Speaker to intervene after the fact in order to stop the statement or allow responses from the opposition.

Additionally, there appears to be some disagreement as to which ministry is the subject of the statement made by the member for Guelph-Wellington. For these reasons, I will refrain from ruling specifically on the case at hand.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to remind all members and in particular those that are parliamentary assistants that members' statements are not intended to be used for parliamentary assistants to make statements that ought to be reserved for statements by the ministry. I am confident that continued care will be taken to avoid doing so.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just wonder if perhaps we could revert back to members' statements. We seem to have missed one on this side. I'm not sure whose fault it was, but we always do three statements in each party.

The Speaker: You are absolutely correct. I was in error. I made a mistake, and there is one more statement. I'm sure we have consent to do the remaining member's statement. Agreed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS (continued)

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I thank the House.

This week, the Environmental Commissioner released his annual report. In that report, he took your government to task for your lack of a clear plan to deal with greenhouse gases. Despite all of your announcements about what a wonderful job you're doing in reducing greenhouse gases and protecting the environment, the Environmental Commissioner has seen through your rhetoric and exposed your lack of a plan to respond to climate change. You have no targets in place. You have no plan in place. You cannot even decide on a lead ministry to deal with this.

There was still more embarrassing news for your government in the report: pages and pages of examples of where your government is putting the natural environment at risk.

Your greenbelt growth scheme came under fire from the Environmental Commissioner. He pointed to your lack of a plan to properly deal with the number of people who will be settling in the area. The Environmental Commissioner is worried about the impact this will have on the natural environment. In his remarks, the Environmental Commissioner warned of the impact that population growth will have on issues like transportation, waste disposal and water taking. We know that your greenbelt plans were based on political science, not real science, and now the Environmental Commissioner has confirmed it. There is no leadership being shown by this government.

Your failure to act has forced the Environmental Commissioner to join the chorus of voices asking you to develop a plan to deal with the tonnes of waste coming from the GTA. Every problem that is out there now will be magnified because of the growth projected for this area. In short, he's asking you to develop a plan. Is it true you don't have a plan? Do you even have a plan to have a plan?

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I'm sure all members would like to join me in thanking our group of pages. This is their last day. They have performed admirably in our service, and I'm sure we would all like to express our appreciation.

Applause.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD PRESERVATION ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 PRÉSERVANT LA PROPRIÉTÉ FAMILIALE DE FREDERICK BANTING

Mr. Wilson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 20, An Act to ensure the preservation of the Frederick Banting homestead / Projet de loi 20, Loi visant à assurer la préservation de la propriété familiale de Frederick Banting.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): If passed, the new Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act, 2005, would impose a restrictive covenant on the property that prevents a person from altering or demolishing any building or structure located on that property. It also restricts the use of the property to use as an educational and interpretive centre, such as a camp for diabetic youth operated on a non-profit basis, agricultural uses, or uses authorized by the Minister of Culture.

1350

ENERGY CONSERVATION RESPONSIBILITY ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ EN MATIÈRE DE CONSERVATION DE L'ÉNERGIE

Mrs. Cansfield moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to enact the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2005 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 and the Conservation Authorities Act / Projet de loi 21, Loi édictant la Loi de 2005 sur le leadership en matière de conservation de l'énergie et apportant des modifications à la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité, à la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario et à la Loi sur les offices de protection de la nature.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may have a brief statement.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I will leave my statement for ministerial statements.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES SERVICES AUX PERSONNES AYANT UNE DÉFICIENCE INTELLECTUELLE

Mr. Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 22, An Act to amend the Developmental Services Act / Projet de loi 22, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): The bill amends the Developmental Services Act to require the minister, under the act, to operate and maintain the present facilities for persons with developmental disability under the following names: Huronia Regional Centre of Excellence at Orillia, the Rideau Regional Centre of Excellence at Smiths Falls, and Southwestern Regional Centre of Excellence at Cedar Springs. The bill prevents the minister from establishing any further facilities. Under the bill, the minister has to ensure that residential facilities receive the services and assistance that are necessary for their needs.

CELEBRATION OF HELLENIC HERITAGE ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LA FÊTE DU PATRIMOINE HELLÉNIQUE

Mr. Duguid moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 23, An Act to proclaim a day and a month to celebrate Hellenic heritage in Ontario / Projet de loi 23, Loi proclamant un jour et un mois de fête du patrimoine hellénique en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): This is a bill that was originally brought forward by the member from Hamilton Mountain, and I had the pleasure of bringing it forward in the last legislative sitting. It had unanimous support of all three parties.

The bill proclaims March 25 in each year as Hellenic Heritage Day and the month of March in each year as Hellenic History and Heritage Month.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Caplan has asked for unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(g), notice for ballot item 7 be waived.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): This afternoon, I introduced the Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, 2005, for first reading. This legislation, if passed, will be an important step toward creating a culture of conservation in Ontario. Since 2003, our government has taken decisive action to create this culture of conservation in the province. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: passing Bill 100, the Electricity Restructuring Act, 2004, which implemented the recommendations of the energy supply and conservation task force; creating the conservation bureau within the Ontario Power Authority; appointing Ontario's first chief conservation officer; enabling Ontario's local electricity distribution companies to invest more than \$160 million for energy conservation measures across Ontario; through the Ontario Realty Corp., reducing electricity

demand on the Ontario Realty Corp.-managed buildings by as much as 7.8%, well within reach of the 10% target by 2007; and creating a net metering program that allows farmers, small businesses and consumers to reduce their use of electricity from the grid.

This represents just a fraction of what the government has done with respect to energy conservation. In addition to these measures, the government also created the conservation action team, made up of 12 parliamentary assistants, which I had the pleasure of chairing.

I want to take a moment to recognize and thank all the members of the action team for their hard work and their dedication, and to thank the hundreds of people and organizations that we met with as we developed our report. The report has laid the groundwork for future action by this government and the conservation bureau, and I am pleased that the work of the action team will continue.

When it comes to energy conservation, our government has achieved much over a very short time, and we will go even further in the future. In addition to our own efforts, I want to recognize the leadership that has been taken by non-governmental organizations and the broader public sector, including many of Ontario's municipalities, universities, colleges, schools and hospitals. In particular, I'd like to recognize the following in the members' gallery today: Dr. David Suzuki is on his way—the chair of the David Suzuki Foundation, who is one of our country's leading scientists, broadcasters and educators—and when he does arrive, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you formally introduce him to all—and is the leading thinker on energy issues dealing with sustainability and conservation; Dr. Gary Polonsky, president of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, which is a leader in energy conservation through a variety of measures, including a state-of-the-art heat pump system; Theresa Sauren, project manager, Reduce the Juice—Reduce the Juice is an innovative energy conservation program that was led by students that is raising awareness around energy conservation and the goal of reducing energy use by 5%—from Shelburne; and in the gallery today there are many other leaders from the broader public sector and the conservation community that are leading this effort as well. I thank all of them for coming today, for their collective work is an example from which we all can learn.

1400

The legislation that I've introduced today recognizes and builds upon the foundations that we as a government have already established. And it builds on the important work that has been undertaken by leaders in the broader public sector and in the NGO, or non-governmental organization, conservation community.

This bill, if passed, would remove additional barriers to conservation that exist and would make conservation a key element in public sector planning and operations. Under the bill, ministries, agencies and broader public sector organizations would be required to prepare energy conservation strategies on a regular basis and report on

energy consumption, proposed conservation measures and progress on achieving results. As servants of the public, we collectively need to ensure that we are doing all that we can when it comes to energy conservation, and this bill will help by giving us the tools to carry out the job.

This bill also includes proposed legislation that will, if passed, facilitate the installation of 800,000 smart meters by 2007 and in all Ontario homes and businesses by 2010. Smart metering is an innovative technology that will help Ontario consumers manage their energy use, encourage energy conservation and save money. Combined with a pricing structure that reflects the true cost of power production at certain times of the day and year, smart metering would allow customers to make informed decisions about their electricity use. This will allow Ontario consumers to save money and to reduce the strain on the power system at peak times.

In addition to this legislation, I am also pleased to announce that the ministry has directed the Ontario Power Authority to carry out additional programs that could reduce electricity use by as much as 200 megawatts, or enough power for 125,000 homes. The directives include: a low-income and social housing program built upon the ministry's successful pilots on energy conservation and demand-side management with various organizations; an appliance exchange program that will encourage electricity consumers to replace energy-inefficient appliances such as refrigerators, dishwashers and freezers; and a conservation outreach and education program targeting residential consumers and small and medium-sized enterprises that would promote energy-efficient lighting technologies and efficient lighting design.

As well, the government will be taking additional action in the near future on a number of fronts, including: making low-cost funding available to Ontario's municipalities and universities for energy efficiency projects through the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority; consulting stakeholders on regulatory amendments to the Ontario Building Code to increase energy efficiencies in buildings; and connecting Ontario government buildings and the main Legislative Building to the deep-lake cooling project, which will substantially reduce our electricity use during the summer period.

All of these examples demonstrate our government's commitment and our progress as we work toward building a conservation culture in this province. We will continue removing the barriers to conservation and energy efficiency, and we will continue promoting new technologies and new ideas. And we will continue to provide the vision and the leadership to build a new, sustainable energy future for Ontario.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I rise today to mark the upcoming Crime Prevention Week, 2005. Ontario is a

safe place, but we can make it even safer. Crime Prevention Week offers us a great opportunity to showcase all we can accomplish when we work together to prevent crime.

This year, crime prevention week runs from November 6 to November 12. I'd like to take a moment to remind Ontarians that crime prevention is everyone's responsibility. The police can't do it alone. While my ministry provides police services with the tools they need to do their jobs effectively, business and the public have an important role to play as well. That's why this year's theme, "Your Family, Your Community: Keep Them Safe!" is very relevant.

Local partnerships between police and the community are very effective in reducing the opportunity for crime and making Ontario safer. Activities organized by communities and police services during Crime Prevention Week feature local community partnerships and help promote personal and public safety through prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Our government supports crime prevention initiatives throughout Ontario and believes that fostering co-operation between the community and police is key to achieving our goal to make Ontario safer and more prosperous.

I also want to commend the work done by police officers in their communities and in schools, and with children, seniors and local businesses to foster crime prevention. This is extremely important work. It's the dedication and commitment of police officers and members of the community that do make a difference. Parents, families and teachers also have a role to play, and public education is key to our efforts. If every one of us did our part, the impact would be huge. Crime Prevention Week is a good opportunity to discuss this topic.

My ministry works in collaboration with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police to promote crime prevention. Working with the association and our other partners allows us to support effective crime prevention initiatives. In 2004-05, our safer communities grant program distributed \$655,000 to 42 crime prevention community projects. These projects help improve the safety of many of our communities by focusing local attention on such topics as youth crime, hate crimes, crimes against seniors and Internet luring.

In Toronto, our government continues to support community programs created to deter youth from joining gangs and offering them positive alternatives. Our government provided \$500,000 again this year for the Jobs for Youth program in Toronto. Since its creation in 2004, the project has helped hundreds of at-risk youth from six neighbourhoods in the city to find summer employment for five weeks. Our government believes that helping at-risk youth find summer employment gives them important opportunities for a brighter future and helps make Toronto stronger, safer and more prosperous.

Also in Toronto, we provide funding for the public education and crime eradication, or PEACE, project. Launched by the Toronto Police Service, project PEACE specifically targets the problem of guns and gangs in the

city. Our government provided over \$270,000 to support this initiative, which has public education, crime prevention and increased enforcement components. Project PEACE will help steer young people away from gangs, help those already involved with them leave those gangs, and help remove guns from our streets with a gun amnesty program.

On a broader scale, the McGuinty government's Safer Communities-1,000 Officers Partnership will also significantly foster crime prevention in Ontario. Half of the 1,000 new police officers hired during our mandate will be assigned to community policing duties that have an important crime prevention aspect to them, such as street patrols, traffic enforcement, school visits and working with youth.

I'm happy to say that police services will know, in the very near future, the allocation of the new officers we will be funding. These new officers will help communities across Ontario build on the success of local crime prevention efforts. In many places, including Waterloo, Hamilton and Durham region, local crime prevention programs have been hailed as examples of the effectiveness of partnerships between police and the community.

Crime Prevention Week offers all Ontarians the opportunity to make a difference and to support local groups and volunteers that often work unnoticed during the whole year to make their communities safer.

Keeping our families and our communities safe is not only the work of the police. Crime Prevention Week 2005 and its theme—Your Family, Your Community: Keep Them Safe!—are not just reminders that it's up to all of us to do our part. It's also a good opportunity to thank those volunteers and groups that work together to make us safer. To them and to the police officers across Ontario who risk their lives to keep us safe, the McGuinty government expresses its gratitude.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

1410

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I'm pleased to respond to the statement by the Minister of Energy today.

For two years they've been talking smart meters. We've heard about them a thousand times. Today we actually get a bill, but, as is the case with most McGuinty government announcements, little by way of details. When asked this morning what the cost of these smart meters was going to be, basically the minister responded, "Well, I have no idea, but we'll give you a price when we roll them out." So people are being told again, "We're the McGuinty government. Trust us." They've bought that line once too often; they're not going to buy it any more.

What is the cost going to be to apartments that have to be retrofitted? People aren't going to be running down stairs to the meter room to see if the washing machine is

saving them some money at 3 o'clock in the morning. They're going to have to have some work done to get these meters into their apartments. Some of these apartments are on bulk metering today. What's going to be done about that and who's going to bear the cost? The minister hasn't talked about any of those details. She doesn't want to talk about them.

Some 800,000 by 2007—where are they going to be?

When asked about the success of their pilot projects, the minister couldn't respond to that either. They really don't have any empirical data about how these pilot projects have been working, but here they roll out the meters because, "You know what? It's Thursday. It's time for a new McGuinty announcement. The papers are going out in the morning. We've got to have something to hand out to the press."

People across the province of Ontario are asking themselves, "Will this initiative actually save us money, or is it just another game on the part of the McGuinty government that has no energy plan for the province of Ontario?" That's what they keep asking us. Where's the price of electricity going in this province under this government? They remember that other promise—you know, the one about 4.3 until 2006. I know they haven't forgotten it. This government's forgotten about it; the people haven't forgotten about it.

We know that in the province of Ontario the biggest concern—and we understand that conservation is very, very important and has to be a significant part of any energy plan. The problem is, this government has no energy plan to make it a part of.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to respond to Minister Kwinter's statement on Crime Prevention Week.

We're 25 months into the McGuinty government and, so far, what have they really done? They've passed one bill, one community safety piece of legislation. But what they haven't told us today in the minister's statement is about the \$300 million that the justice ministries are being asked to trim from their budgets—\$300 million. That's crime prevention money that you're asked—

Interjections.

Mr. Dunlop: If this government cares so much about crime prevention today, let's talk about the parole board. They're trying to save \$2.1 million on the parole board, but it's going to cost federal taxpayers—and that's everybody—\$10 million to run it. Of course, you all know the rate of release in that particular area. About 60% of the people are released by the National Parole Board, and yet we're doing our very best to get rid of the provincial parole system here in Ontario.

The 1,000 cops—can you believe that? Again he announced it today, 1,000 cops. It was part of your mandate. It was part of the government's mandate. They were supposed to do it over the term, and they've done nothing. Seven times they've made this announcement.

My former assistant, Ms. Kwiecinski, can help me with that. Is that not right, Ms. Kwiecinski: seven times, 1,000 police officers? If you had actually started to implement the program, we could have had a third of those police officers on the street by now, but we don't.

Interjections.

Mr. Dunlop: No, you don't have them. The bottom line is, you've made the announcement over and over and over and you've not provided the police services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Please stop the clock. The member for Simcoe North is getting way too much assistance. He has the floor. When the government ministers were making their announcements, it was quiet. I think the member for Simcoe North deserves the same.

Mr. Dunlop: It's nice, on Crime Prevention Week, to make a fancy statement, but you actually have to do something to help community safety. You actually have to do something, and we haven't seen it. We have seen no action; they've been missing in action. They haven't even made negotiations with their federal counterparts, those other folks who are soft on crime. We've seen nothing in this country or in this province in the last two years that would indicate this government cares about law and order in this province.

I say again, let's actually see some action. Let's forget about slashing \$300 million out of the justice ministries. Let's get the cops on the streets now, and let's protect our streets and keep our communities safe through law and order.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I must respond to the Minister of Energy, who yet again today held another photo op, but I was left at the photo op looking for the details. We're now into the third year of the McGuinty government, and all we have from the McGuinty government in the way of an energy efficiency strategy is a statement that something might happen.

I want to contrast this with something that was laid out for the government over 18 months ago by the Pembina Institute and the Canadian Environmental Law Association in their report on energy efficiency. I just want to read a few of the things:

"The government of Ontario should adopt minimum energy efficiency standards under the Energy Efficiency Act equivalent to the energy efficiency levels required for Energy Star labelling for all major electricity-using devices." After three years, has the McGuinty government done that? No.

"The provincial building code should be amended to require R2000, Canadian building improvement program ... or equivalent energy efficiency performance." Three years into the McGuinty environment, have they done that? No. Now they might go and consult about the building code.

"The Planning Act should be amended to permit municipalities to make energy efficiency design requirements a condition of planning and site approvals for new developments." Has the McGuinty government done that after three years? No.

"The most energy-efficient technologies in all sectors and end uses should be labelled through the Energy Star program or, if not included in Energy Star, through a provincial labelling system." After three years, has the McGuinty government done that? No.

"The government of Ontario should establish a partnership with utilities, financial institutions, energy service companies, municipalities, and other stakeholders to offer a series of financing mechanisms to assist electricity consumers in all sectors to finance the adoption of energy-efficient products and technologies." After three years, has the McGuinty government done that? No, they haven't.

"The government of Ontario should enter into an agreement with the federal government" on:

—"Grants for high-efficiency home energy retrofits and new R2000 homes." Have they done that? No.

—"Grants toward the additional cost of new high-efficiency commercial buildings and commercial building retrofits." After three years, have they done that? No.

—"Sales tax rebates for all Energy Star products in all sectors and small-scale renewable energy power sources." Have they done that after three years? In fact, what they did is they rescinded the tax rebates on those things.

—"Business tax credits for industrial energy efficiency equipment and cogeneration systems.

"These incentives should focus initially on technologies where the largest reductions can be achieved at the lowest cost." Has the McGuinty government done that after three years? No.

This is from the province of Manitoba. A resident in Manitoba today can get a \$5,000 low-interest loan to refit their home and put in insulation. They can use this money to put in energy-efficient windows. They can use this money to buy energy-efficient appliances. They can reduce their electricity consumption by 35% today. They're not facing an electricity shortage. Has the McGuinty government done this after three years? No.

From Quebec, another province that is not short of electricity: Quebec engaged in a strategy to start retrofitting literally dozens of apartment buildings in downtown Montreal this summer. Why? Because, like apartment buildings in Ontario that were built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, they don't have very good insulation. They had electric heat that was not very efficient. Quebec is retrofitting those apartment buildings to get electricity consumption down. Has the McGuinty government done that after three years? No.

What we had today was an announcement that was heavy on photo ops, but after three years, what we've seen from the McGuinty government is a \$6.5-billion deal for a nuclear fixer-upper. That's your energy policy. The rest has been window dressing.

CRIME PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm grateful for the brief period of time that I have to join with others in this House in saluting our police officers in the course of Crime Prevention Week. I say to this Solicitor General that perhaps he should have talked to his Attorney General, whose fetish for ensuring that every traffic ticket in this province is adequately prosecuted in fact conflicts with his abandonment of our criminal courts, where Askov withdrawals are occurring at an unprecedented rate.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes to recognize Remembrance Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Caplan has asked for unanimous consent to speak to Remembrance Day—up to five minutes for each recognized party. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I'm honoured to make a statement on behalf of the government to mark Veterans' Week next week, which ends with Remembrance Day. Each year we pause and reflect on the high price that was paid by our veterans for the peace and freedom we enjoy today. They put their lives at risk, and more than 110,000 Canadians died to protect our way of life.

That price was paid by Canadian men and women, many of whom were in their teens. I personally reflect back that when I was in my teens, I never had to worry about going off to war or living in fear of being killed. I reflect back on very carefree days. Perhaps I worried about an exam or a baseball game that might be rained out. I never spent more than a few days away from home—and you think of the young people who spent two and three years in a battle zone. I travelled through Europe, but it was with a backpack on a carefree holiday. I didn't fight my way through Europe, living in fear for my life. Like most of our generation and the generations that followed, I have lived in peace and relative prosperity because of the sacrifices that were made by these courageous men and women. In all, more than a million and a half Canadians have served in the two world wars and the Korean War and, as I said earlier, 110,000 paid the ultimate price.

This year, we will honour the memory of those who died with two minutes of silence on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, the moment when the guns fell silent in the First World War. Those brave Canadian soldiers, sailors, air crew, merchant navy and others put the welfare of their country and community first.

Last year, I went with my 10-year-old grandson to our local Legion on Remembrance Day. Sometimes it takes looking at the world through the eyes of a young person to really see what we take for granted. I remember that we were sitting and talking with veterans, and he started talking about the medals. He pointed at them and asked the veterans, "What was that for? What was that for?" The veterans would say, "That was for this campaign. That was for this service. That was for this act of bravery." I've been to numerous events, I've seen hundreds of veterans wearing their medals, but I don't think I've ever really stopped and thought about the sacrifices that each of those medals represented until I heard my grandson talk about it.

There were two female veterans sitting there. He said, "What did you do during the war?" They were with the British Armed Forces. They were the people who tracked bombers coming across into Britain and measured where they were coming from and where they were going. I reflected on that, and I thought, "I've never gone to sleep—ever—worrying if something was going to happen to my house tonight, like a bomb." It took a simple question from a child to really bring home the message of what our veterans sacrificed to protect our freedom.

This year, as we all know, commemorates the Year of the Veteran. I'm proud that the Legislature, your office, Mr. Speaker, and all the parties strongly support the veterans' memorial that we will begin building very shortly on the grounds of the Legislature—the first time, as you know, Mr. Speaker, I think in 65 years that we've had on the grounds a new memorial. This summer we announced the design, and many of the members here were at that.

In Ontario, veterans have a special licence plate that allows us to recognize them. We partnered with the Dominion Institute on our Memory Project that will record, I think, over 500 of our veterans' memories of their experiences so that we'll never lose that memory. We will always have that at our disposal.

On behalf of the government, I thank once again our veterans. I'd like to close with the final lines from something that I think all of us hear every year at Remembrance Day services, and that's the lines from Lieutenant Colonel Dr. John McCrae's poem, *In Flanders Fields*. He says, as we all remember:

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Let us resolve to keep faith with those who sacrificed their lives and their dreams to save our freedom and to give the future we enjoy today. Let us never forget.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): It is my privilege to speak on behalf of the Progressive Conservative Party. Like most members of this Legislature, I will

be attending Remembrance Day observances in my riding over the course of the next week.

This year, of course, is the Year of the Veteran, and that has no doubt contributed to a heightened sense of awareness and caring about Remembrance Day and about what it is all about. But I don't think the simple declaration of a richly deserved honour such as a Year of the Veteran really lies behind this increased interest, nor do I think it is attributable to the fact that it is the 85th anniversary of the official end of World War I and the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II that lies behind this. Indeed, I don't believe it is explained by the fact that we have fewer and fewer veterans of those wars whom we are still able to honour in their lifetimes. A number are here in your gallery today, sir.

Although I'm sure that all of these things contribute to this heightened awareness, I think there's more to it than that. I think that the toll taken by current wars, perhaps the unfathomable loss of life we've seen this year from natural disasters, these things have given us a greater appreciation for two things, and both of them, I would suggest, are incredibly important.

The first is the very fragile nature of life itself, and while we now see that more vividly than ever before, whether through pictures of conflict going on today or pictures of natural disasters, we are more graphically reminded. I think it brings home to us the scale of the sacrifice that thousands and thousands of Canadian families made—and the minister made reference to this just a moment ago—so that we could live the lives that we lead and, yes, so that we could have the debates that we have right here in this place, among many, many blessings that those people made possible for us.

That is the second thing that I think we have a growing appreciation for: namely, the priceless nature of the freedoms that we have today in a world where many still do not, and of the need that this creates for all of us to do whatever we can to enhance and promote freedom and democracy.

This heightened appreciation of these two things is good and I think it has manifested itself in many ways. In the town of Mount Forest in my constituency, students, teachers and families from the community banded together to support the naming of a school as the Victoria Cross Public School, as Mount Forest had two of only 94 people ever awarded the Victoria Cross in Canada. Each classroom in the school—a lot of the work on this was done by students, and they came and showed me some of their work earlier this year—is dedicated to a living veteran, and there is a huge outreach program involving the students, the teachers and the whole community and the veterans who live in that community.

Many members probably face the same challenges I do, representing a sprawling rural constituency, relating to the number of services one could attend, many of them scheduled, of course, at the same hour on the same one or two days of this week and next. It isn't possible to be at all of those. When I called people to ask them if they would lay the provincial wreath on my behalf—and it's

my first year as a member of provincial Parliament—I found, as many members of the Legislature probably have before, that what I thought was a favour that I was asking of them, to go and do this on my behalf, was in fact an honour that they saw being bestowed upon them. Indeed, when you think about it for a minute, it is a great honour being bestowed upon them, as it is upon us, to have the privilege of going and presenting those wreaths so that we can remember.

1430

So, in the presence of the veterans here today, to those who are watching on television and to the families and memories of those no longer with us, I join my colleagues on all sides of this House in saying a simple but heartfelt word of thanks. It hardly seems adequate, but perhaps this heightened sense of awareness of the sacrifices made, perhaps the greater recognition of freedoms won and preserved are an even better way in which we can all express our gratitude.

Last Sunday, together with the Minister of Community Safety, I and hundreds of other people had the privilege of attending the groundbreaking for the Jewish veterans' war memorial in Earl Bales Park here in Toronto. I want to repeat the closing words from the short statement I was privileged to make on that occasion. Referring to the magnificent monument to be built, I said it was our responsibility to ensure that it stands as a reminder of the need for all of us, every day, to be constantly vigilant against discrimination and war and terrorism so that our children won't have to erect monuments like this in future years; so that those children, while they will not have forgotten the history that brought us here and the sacrifices which made it possible, will instead be gathering on Sunday mornings or any other morning of the week, yes, to remember, but also to celebrate and embrace our differences which do so much to contribute to the strength of our magnificent Canadian citizenship that these veterans did so much to make sure we have today.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): On behalf of New Democrats, I am pleased to be able to say to those veterans who are here and to veterans across Ontario once again how much we appreciate the sacrifice they made. As my colleagues have pointed out, it seems that as time goes on, much of Ontario becomes more and more cognizant of the sacrifices that were made. One of the things that strike me when I attend Remembrance Day ceremonies is that the turnout seems to be growing, not shrinking; that more and more people are coming out. People are coming out because it was their father, it was their grandfather, it was their mother, it was an uncle; it was someone—the father or grandfather of a friend of theirs. I think it speaks well for Canadians that we recognize at this time, as my colleague Mr. Tory has said, 60 years after the end of the second war, the incredible sacrifice that was made.

What strikes me at this time of year—I have a rural constituency, and virtually every small municipality has a Remembrance Day ceremony—when you go to some of

these small villages where there are maybe 800 people and you read the names on the cenotaph, you realize that almost every young man and many young women in that community must have joined Canada's armed forces in the second war and in the first war. When you look at the size of the population, and then you look at the long list of names and at the list of names of those who did not come back, you recognize that this was not the sacrifice of a few; this was not the giving of some, but literally of whole communities.

A few years ago, one of the First Nations in my community established their memorial. What struck me when I attended the ceremony was the number of young people who had obviously heard the call. It wasn't from one First Nation; it was from several. The First Nations at that time didn't even have a road connecting them to Ontario's highway system. These were young people who literally would have come out of the bush in canoes in order to take part in what they saw as their public duty.

We owe it as well to recognize that those people who served and then came back have continued to make an incredible contribution to our society. These are the people, for example, who led the fight for a Canada pension plan; these are the people who led the fight to establish a medicare system.

Besides having served in the war, these were also, many of them, the children of the Depression, who when they came back, especially from the second war, said, "We are not going to allow what happened before the war to happen again. We're not going to allow people to live in abject poverty at the same time we see some living with incredible wealth."

These are the people who in many ways have led the struggle for the kind of Ontario and the kind of Canada that those of us who are my age have been able to enjoy: post-secondary education that was affordable, the expansion of the community college system, the expansion of the university system.

But I think of it in a more personal way. As a young boy growing up, like most Canadian boys I wanted to play hockey. My first hockey coach was a veteran. My second hockey coach was a veteran. Later on, when I got to be a teenager and started to look around, I recognized that virtually all the referees, all the coaches, all the convenors, the managers—the people who made the minor hockey system run—were veterans.

I wondered why some of them sometimes walked with a shuffle and why some of them would say, "I'd love to get out on the ice but I can't." It was later on that I understood why some of them could not. They were not physically able to do so any more, having suffered a wound in the war. But they were dedicated to making sure that kids like me had opportunities they never had.

When they were 17 and 18, they were looking to go to war, not looking to go to university, not looking to play hockey, not looking to enjoy many other things we've enjoyed. For that and all of their sacrifices, we owe them an enduring thank you.

The Speaker: I would ask all members and guests to rise for a period of silence in remembrance.

The House observed a moment's silence.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I have a brief announcement: Mr. Giacomo Mancini, member of Parliament from Italy, leading a delegation of mayors and members of council from Italy to Canada, is here with us. Would you please welcome them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Acting Premier. We learned in the past day that Emergency Management Ontario notified officials in your government, including those who—I'll quote from the EMO spokesperson—"needed to be notified" in the Premier's office, about the health emergency on the Kashechewan reserve on October 15, fully 10 days before your government took action. My question is simply this. Both the Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources claimed they knew nothing of the health emergency until October 24, 10 days later. There now appears to be a huge discrepancy. Can the minister inform the House who in the Premier's office received that notice on October 15 from the Emergency Management Ontario office, who else did that person inform, and if the Premier wasn't in fact notified on October 15, why not?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): What I can tell the member is the chronology we have discussed. Chief Friday issued an emergency declaration on October 15, and that day the Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada announced they were flying in 1,500 18-litre bottles of water each and every day. The next day, INAC reported that the water plant had been fixed, and on October 17, Health Canada reported there was no longer E. coli in the water. On October 22 and 23, a medical delegation visited the community at the request of Chief Friday and did an evaluation. Chief Friday and Dr. Trussler came to Queen's Park, met with the Premier and myself and presented their evidence, and within that meeting we declared the emergency.

1440

Mr. Tory: Again to the Acting Premier: I want to quote from section 4 of the 1992 emergency planning agreement between Ontario's First Nations and the province of Ontario. It says, "When an emergency occurs at a First Nation community ... the chief of the First

Nation council may declare an emergency. If the chief ... requires additional emergency assistance, such assistance may be requested from Ontario."

That language is consistent with Ontario's Emergency Management Act, and indeed was the same process used by the Kashechewan reserve to notify Emergency Management Ontario fully 10 days before your government took action. The chronology you gave us a moment ago said nothing about what I asked you about, which is that Emergency Management Ontario says it received the notice, I guess, on October 15, and they said they told the people in the Premier's office who "needed to be notified" about this.

My question again is, why did it take your government so long to act, given that you were informed about this 10 days before, and what was going on in the government during the period between October 15 and October 24, when you knew about this and you had received this notice?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I'd hate to have to repeat the chronology I just gave him in answer to the previous question, but the point of that chronology is that the federal government reacted on the same day to start to alleviate the water problem. It was a water problem; there was nothing life-threatening at that particular time that the water being brought in couldn't alleviate. That was happening, and the source of the problem, the water plant, was being addressed; so all the problems were being addressed immediately after that.

Mr. Tory: The fact is that the notice in question, dated October 13, sent on the 15th and transmitted to the Premier's office, according to Emergency Management Ontario, said right here that it was resolved by the First Nation's council resolution that people should be "med-evacuated out for immediate treatment and that Emergency Management Ontario ... officials be brought in," etc. to address the water contamination. That's exactly what it said here on a document dated October 13, transmitted on the 15th and across to the Premier's office on the 15th.

When the mayor of Cobourg declared an emergency at 3:45 p.m. on April 25 this year, the province had a representative on the ground 15 minutes before the declaration was made public. When Peterborough was hit by a flood last July, the Minister of Community Safety was on site that afternoon, after a state of emergency had been declared by the mayor of Peterborough at 7 a.m. that morning.

That is how the process is supposed to work. Why did it take 10 days in this case, 10 days after the emergency management office and the Premier's office knew? Why did it take 10 days?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I remind the member that the declaration order was declared on the 15th, while on the 17th, test results by Health Canada indicated there was no longer E. coli in the water. Also on the 17th, Health Canada's chief medical officer of health told the community members that there was no risk to public safety. What happened after that, once the E. coli was dealt with, was the high level of chlorine. It took the next few days

to realize that this was causing aggravation of skin ailments. That's the information we had on Monday and Tuesday last week, and the Premier and I acted on that.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question to the Acting Premier concerns an issue that affects families across Ontario. In Peterborough, Fisher-Cast Global announced last month that employees have been told that between 30 and 40 of their workers will be laid off. Port Hope's largest employer, Collins and Aikman, laid off 70 full-time workers. Further down the road, in Cornwall, over 1,500 jobs have been lost in recent months, including 553 people at the Domtar plant and more than 60 employees at Spartech Plastics, which closed this fall.

It has become very clear, including up to the minute of your economic statement in the last couple of days, where there was not a word on this, that you have no plan to give these people any sense of hope or future opportunity for themselves or for their families. What do you have to say, two days after your economic statement which said nothing, to these families that have been affected by these layoffs and that continue, in different communities, to be affected by these layoffs?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I will reiterate, just in one month alone, September of this year, 17,300 net new jobs have been created in Ontario; since taking office, 193,000 net new jobs. The unemployment rate is at its lowest rate since July 2001.

We have a new Toyota plant that's being built in Ontario—the first time we've seen a new auto plant in Ontario in some 20 years; the Ford Motor Co., a \$1-billion investment in Oakville, in part due to this government's program; General Motors, the \$2.5-billion Beacon project.

We're most proud of the fact that we are investing in our economic advantages: health care, education and the skills of our people. As long as there's one unemployed person who wants work, this government will continue to strive to create those jobs, to work with the private sector, to work with the productive workers of this economy, to ensure that Ontario continues to lead the world in all sectors of its economy.

Mr. Tory: Again to the Acting Premier: Kingston and Brockville in eastern Ontario were hit just last month when Beautyrock, Inc. closed two call centres, throwing 200 people out of work. The Saputo cheese factory in Harrowsmith, outside of Kingston, announced two weeks ago that the factory is closing, impacting all 89 employees. But of course, as we all know, it's not just these factories and workplaces that are closing. Harrowsmith and neighbouring Verona have lost two churches, a discount store, convenience stores, a restaurant and an antique store in recent times because of plant closures such as this and the ripple effect it has across these communities.

Minister, what precisely is your plan to help the over 300 families in Kingston, Brockville, Harrowsmith and Verona to address this loss of jobs and the 42,000 other jobs lost across Ontario in manufacturing so far this year?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We intend to create the climate for growth that we need in this economy to do the things like—for instance, just last week, De Beers said they're moving ahead in the next phase of new diamond mines in northern Ontario, a potential \$1-billion investment that will create 600 construction jobs, 375 jobs during production, contributing \$6.7 billion to the economy; the new research and development facility at the University of Windsor in conjunction with Navistar; GlaxoSmithKline, a \$23-million expansion, 75 new jobs; Automodular Corp. building a new plant in Oakville, 400 new jobs; Minacs Worldwide opening a new call centre in Chatham, 300 new jobs; RioCan and Trinity Development Group, \$151 million. The list goes on and on.

This government has created a climate for investment and growth. All the numbers are up. As long as one citizen in this province wants a job and is looking hard for it, his or her government will stand behind them and continue to create the climate for investment that we have in the two years since we've taken office.

Mr. Tory: My colleague from Simcoe—Grey has asked for a simple meeting between the Premier and community and business leaders from Collingwood and nearby communities to address the 1,000 actual and potential job losses in his riding this year alone. The Premier has refused this request, and you didn't respond favourably to it when asked the other day either.

My colleague from Lanark—Carleton proposed that an eastern Ontario economic development fund be created to provide financial assistance to help local economies in rural areas and some of these smaller urban municipalities. While you supported this initiative at second reading, it died with your new session. Will you commit today, on behalf of the Premier, to implement this economic fund for communities across eastern Ontario, to sit down with the Premier and have a meeting with these people in Simcoe—Grey to discuss the devastating layoffs they're experiencing in their community? Will you give those commitments?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The Premier and I continue to meet with interested citizens across the province, as do my colleagues. No government has committed more to economic development than this government.

I've got to tell you, I'm a little tired of hearing about empathy from the Leader of the Opposition. When he was at Rogers, let's just look at the numbers: in 2002, 187 layoffs; in 2001, 170 layoffs; in 2003, 175 layoffs. And what did he say? What was his empathetic response at the time? "It's a sign of the times. Most businesses today are finding that they have to reduce their costs and that includes ... people costs."

1450

We don't think that's empathetic, just like his party cut welfare benefits, just like you refused to raise the minimum wage, things that we've done. This party has

empathy for working people and working families. This party has created the climate of investment growth that your party ignored. This economy continues to grow, and grow in a way that we can all be proud of the working men and women—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. *Interjections.*

The Speaker: Stop the clock.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I remember what you guys used to say when you were over here.

The Speaker: The Minister of Community and Social Services. Order.

New question.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora—Rainy River): My question is for the minister responsible for aboriginal issues. Minister, Emergency Management Ontario says that on October 15 they received a fax from the Kashechewan chief and band council. The fax declared a state of emergency. The EMO officials say that they communicated the information in this fax to the Premier's office and to other people in the government who needed to know about the request for a state of emergency.

On October 25, CBC Television asked you, as minister, "When did you know?" You, Minister, looked into the television camera and said, "We only became aware of this on Monday," the 24th.

Minister, how could the First Nation let the Premier's office know and Emergency Management Ontario know on October 15, and you look into the television and say, "We only learned about this on October 24"?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): As the member knows, on the same day that the emergency declaration was made by the First Nation, INAC had responded immediately by flying in 1,500 18-litre bottles of water each day. On the very next day, INAC reported that the water plant had been fixed, and on October 17, Health Canada reported that there was no longer E. coli in the water.

On the 22nd and 23rd, a medical delegation, at the request of Chief Friday, visited the community and did an evaluation. Chief Friday and Doctor Trussler came to Queen's Park, met with the Premier and myself, and presented their evidence. Within an hour of that meeting—during that meeting—we made the declaration provincially.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, it's not about INAC in Ottawa. It's not about what someone else may have done. It was the fact that the First Nation, according to the law, notified the McGuinty government on October 15 that they considered it a state of emergency. You had some legal requirements to fulfill on the 15th. Not only did you not fulfill those legal requirements, but you looked into

the television camera 10 days later and said, "We didn't know about this until October 24."

Minister, how could the First Nation notify government departments, those government departments notify the Premier's office, and then you look into the camera and tell Ontarians, "I didn't know about this until October 24"? That's the question.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I think the member is confused about what the cause of the original emergency was. That was the presence of E. coli in the water. That was corrected within two days. But a second situation, a secondary situation, developed, caused by the treatment for the E. coli, and that was too much chlorine in the water. That was aggravating skin lesions, skin infections, exacerbating them, and it is that medical evidence that was brought to us on the Monday and the Tuesday that made very apparent to the Premier and myself that there needed to be a medical evacuation.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, perhaps you're the one who's confused. Two years ago, the Ontario Clean Water Agency issued a report that said Kashechewan's water supply is "a Walkerton in waiting." A year ago, your Minister of Health went to Kashechewan and they showed the Minister of Health the difficulties with their water. What did he say? He said he didn't see an urgent situation. Six months ago, your Minister of Community Safety went there and he was shown it; the meeting reports show that. On October 15, you received a very specific notification of an emergency situation. You looked into the camera on October 25 and said, "I didn't know about this until yesterday."

Minister, what does the First Nation have to do to get your attention: come down here and show the media the photographs before the McGuinty government finally pays attention to an emergency situation dealing with tainted water?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: It might have helped if, the week before, the local member and the leader of the third party had mentioned Kashechewan in this House. I never heard that mentioned, and until the delegation came down, that's when we found out about it.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Energy. It's the first time I've ever heard a minister of the crown—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Your new question is for the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs?

Mr. Hampton: My question to the Minister of Energy is this: New Democrats believe in conservation and energy efficiency. We have heard, though, over the last two weeks the McGuinty government announce a \$6.5-billion deal for private, expensive, unreliable and unpredictable nuclear power. Now, with your photo op today, can you tell the people of Ontario, after investing \$6.5

billion in a nuclear deal, how much you're actually going to invest, in dollar terms, in energy efficiency?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I find it amazing that the member from Kenora–Rainy River, who cancelled every conservation program—

Interjections.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: —every one—actually was reading from a document from people who are so supportive of conservation. However, I guess that's another challenge.

We know that, putting together our legislation with the work that is being done by local distribution companies around this province, the people who actually work with communities, the potential saving on the smart metering alone is \$600 million. That is just one small part of a very large puzzle around energy conservation. We are committed to work with and find those energy savings. We had over 50 projects that we participated in.

Mr. Hampton: That was a relatively simple question. We know you're going to put at least \$6.5 billion into a nuclear fixer-upper. After two and a half years, the McGuinty government should know how much you're going to invest in energy efficiency.

By the way, I want to read a quote for you. This was by—I'll tell you who it was later. It says, "We are struggling under the weight of a recession, and the NDP's government policy of energy conservation is going to cause hydro rates to increase." This was an opponent of energy conservation. His name: Dalton McGuinty.

I want to ask you again, why not try a province-wide building retrofit program to reduce electricity consumption and save people money? Manitoba is already doing it, Quebec is already doing it, although they're not in electricity shortage situations—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: There's no question that we are going to maximize what we have. We are going to build new generation and we are going to create a culture of conservation in this province. We have a lot of people who are willing and prepared to help us do that. We are going to promote the energy conservation planning. We are going to demonstrate that leadership, as we have. Actually, in reference to an earlier comment, if the member from Kenora–Rainy River had spoken with me, I could have let him know that there have been nine new products added, four changes to levels, and 15 increases to energy efficiency in appliances in this province. We're moving and we're changing in spite of the member from Kenora–Rainy River.

1500

Mr. Hampton: About the only thing the public's noticed from the McGuinty government in terms of energy efficiency so far is that you cancelled the tax credits in terms of people who want to buy energy-efficient appliances.

Again, I want to ask you: You're going to put \$6.5 billion into a nuclear fixer-upper. Could you tell people, after two and a half years into the McGuinty government, how much money you are going to put into a plan which

would allow lower- and modest-income people who want to get rid of the energy-inefficient fridge or the energy-inefficient freezer to buy energy-efficient appliances and reduce their electricity consumption? If you can tell us about the \$6.5 billion for a nuclear fixer-upper, surely you should be able to tell us how much you're prepared to invest to finance energy-efficient appliances.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: What I will say is thank you to all of the people who have come today who are participating in energy conservation initiatives in every one of their local utilities. I say to all the new technologies, to all the changes that are happening in colleges and universities, to all those people who come forward to work with us to make a difference on behalf of all Ontarians, thank you, because you're the people making a difference today.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Last week, Paul Bradley of your Ontario Power Authority announced the selection of a 900-megawatt project in Brampton through Sithe power. He said that this is to compensate for an unfortunate earlier decision, when a cheaper but less useful plant was selected. The less useful but cheaper selection was Eastern Power's successful bid in Mississauga.

Minister, what does this say to the greater community looking for confidence in the electricity sector when you can much-ballyhoo the awarding of a contract one month and, a few short months later, be saying, "Well, it's a bad thing, so we're doing something else"? You gave the contract. Was it that bad? Explain.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I say to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, obviously we believe in consultation, due process and good diligence. The RFP process was at arm's length from the government.

But do let me tell you about a few things. Site plan approval: St. Clair Power; Greenfield South; GTAA; Loblaw, 10 megawatts; Erie farms, under construction; Kingsbridge wind farm, under construction; Melancthon, under construction; Prince Wind, under construction. Would you like me to go on? There are more.

Interjection: Go on.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Goreway project, underway; cogen, 1,000 megawatts out there; we just put 200 megawatts on with Manitoba, to work toward 1,500 and 3,000; discussions on an east-west grid.

We are moving forward. We listen to the people as well. We work with our municipalities. We believe in the EA process—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Yakabuski: This Sunday night, Desperate Housewives will be pre-empted by desperate ministers. They just jump from one thing to another. She talks about due diligence and the process. How do you award a contract to Sithe power, then, to replace your earlier mistake, without again going through an RFP process? You just seem to hand the contract now, to make up for your earlier mistake, to the second bidder, without

engaging other people who may be interested in bidding for this project. What it says is that you're terribly desperate. You're in a hurry to do something, but you're subverting the process, Minister.

This is a government that is in disarray. What we need to know today is, can you tell us the details of this deal? Is it as bad as the last? It says that the other plant was cheaper. How much more is power going to cost under your new deal? The people of Ontario have a right to know what it's costing them for your mixed-up energy policy.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Maybe if the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke had one of those energy forums we've been giving to the rest of the members—actually we've only had one energy forum for the third party and that was the member for Toronto–Danforth—we could work together on the issues of conservation and the challenges for all Ontarians. I'd be more than happy to have you come over and discuss with me, at any time, all of your questions. All you need to do is just pick up the telephone.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Education. There are 39,000 students on a waiting list for special education in Ontario. This is a terrible situation, just on the face of it. Yesterday, in estimates, we asked why you were capping special education funding for newly enrolled students. You said you were not, yet this is a document from your director of education, finance branch, to directors of education, and it says that "funding for net new needs" for special education in 2005–06 is "capped at \$40 million." Capped, Minister. Now you say it's not capped, but your officials are sending out very clear memoranda saying it is capped. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I think the member opposite would want to let the people of Ontario know that our government increased funding for special needs by \$165 million in our first year. In addition, last year we increased it another \$55 million. In fact, every single claim put forward by every single board in this province was provided for. That's the first time any government has done that in 20 years in this province. So what I would say to the member opposite is that we have a track record with the boards and, more importantly, with the families and the children in this province of covering all those high needs that other governments sought to avoid.

Yesterday, in estimates, I welcomed the interjection from the critic for the honourable member's party and made the undertaking that we will correct the impression created by that memo. We will continue to do what we have done to a degree greater than any other government, which is to make sure that special-needs students—students with special needs—have a place in the classrooms and schools of this province as good and as effective as any other student in this province.

Mr. Hampton: I heard a lot of words, but I don't think I heard an answer. There are 39,000 children who are on a waiting list for special education. Here's the memo that was issued last week. It says that you have capped funding for special education. Here is the memo from Nancy Naylor, assistant deputy minister. What does it say? It says that "funding for net new needs" for special education is "capped at \$40 million." Minister, who is telling the truth? You say funding for special education isn't capped. Two of your bureaucrats are sending out notices to school boards saying it is capped. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We know we don't take that word lightly in this House. I want to say to the member opposite, you're certainly not presenting the facts. There are not 39,000 people waiting for special needs in this province. Thankfully, because of a 65% increase in funding for students with high special needs, we are actually providing services ahead of assessments. We're providing help to students even before they are designated special needs. So that is not the case in this province.

As I acknowledged in estimates yesterday, there was information provided in error. I, as minister, will always take responsibility for that. As I added yesterday to the critic, and the member also knows full well—he wouldn't, I'm sure, be raising issues today to create concern and consternation that are not grounded in reality for those students in this province. I accept and acknowledge and take responsibility for that error. I've also undertaken to remedy it.

I can tell you that we have, through other means, provided the correct information to boards. The boards have provided, in fact—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

1510

IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The media is reporting today that the federal Conservatives voted to block funding for immigration support programs and, as such, could jeopardize long-awaited fair funding that you and the Premier have fought for for a long time on behalf of Ontario newcomers.

Ontario's newcomers deserve better than that from the Tories. The people of Ontario deserve better than that. Minister, what are the consequences of the Conservatives in Ottawa blocking this funding?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I want to thank the member from Scarborough Centre for that question. What happened in Ottawa the other day is unconscionable. The federal Conservatives blocked a bill, blocked money that would have gone, not to the government, but would have gone to the community-based organizations all across this province that help our newcomers with English-as-a-second-language skills. They're basically holding the immigrants of this province and the newcomers hostage. That is

unacceptable. That is something that we will not tolerate, and the people all across this province are going to make sure that that vote gets changed. The Conservatives did the wrong thing, and they had better own up to it.

Mr. Duguid: Maybe the Leader of the Opposition will pick up the phone and give his cousins in Ottawa a call and help us out on this.

Minister, there are non-profit agencies in my community of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I'm having great difficulty hearing the member for Scarborough Centre. He needs to be able to ask his question.

Mr. Duguid: There are non-profit agencies in my community of Scarborough and in many north of my community in places like Malvern that provide invaluable services to newcomers in Ontario by providing them help to integrate successfully into our province. These organizations provide an invaluable service to our newcomers, and they need to access this federal funding. Minister, what does this action by the Conservatives in Ottawa mean to community-based organizations that serve the 125,000 newcomers who are welcomed to Ontario every year and for the future of the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement?

Hon. Mr. Colle: What the Conservatives did yesterday means that organizations like Flemingdon Neighbourhood Services, the Jamaican Canadian Association, the Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada, the Catholic Immigration Centre of Ottawa, the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre—Mr. Harper and the Tories, and we've even got two members who sit on that side who are part of their election team, have basically said that Ontario's newcomers don't deserve fair funding.

This is something we've fought for for 20 years, that for the first time we will ensure that our newcomers get what newcomers in Quebec get. Instead, what happens is that the Conservatives, with their friends here in the House, say that they don't want fair funding for Ontario. It's about time the Conservatives stood up for the people of Ontario, did the right thing and said, "Get that money to the people."

Interjections.

The Speaker: I know it's Thursday, but we need to remember that we need to have respect for all members of the Legislature.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The Minister of Citizenship, you'll come to order. New question.

EARLTON/TIMISKAMING REGIONAL AIRPORT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, Earlton/Timiskaming Regional Airport is facing imminent closure. The township has been trying to get both the provincial and federal government to help.

Earlton airport is minutes away from the largest oriented strandboard plant in the world, owned by Grant Forest Products. The airport is the kind of infrastructure that national companies look for to encourage them to locate and stay in communities. Minister, what is your government going to do to ensure that Earlton/Timiskaming Regional Airport stays open?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The member knows full well that, at any time, the municipalities have every opportunity to make an application to the northern Ontario heritage fund if in fact the project applies. We continue to ensure that we help develop economic growth in northern Ontario through a refocused northern Ontario heritage fund that has indeed created 2,721 jobs to date.

Mr. Miller: Well, so far, your answer won't be much comfort to the people in the Timiskaming-Earlton area.

Minister, you are a northern representative and a cabinet minister. Northern communities are relying on you. Mac Hamilton, chair of the airport municipal services board, says, and I quote from the Timiskaming Speaker: "It is not acceptable to expect northerners to get into their cars and drive in the dead of winter two hours or so to a hospital with a very sick person in the car. Lives will be lost as a result of this facility closing—no doubt."

There are over 400 air ambulance calls a year out of Earlton airport. The airport supports economic development. James Brand of Grant Forest Products says, "We are definitely disturbed corporately by the potential closing of this airport"—as if the forestry sector doesn't have enough problems.

This Saturday, November 5, there's an emergency meeting. Will you make a commitment today to help these communities keep their airport and attend that emergency meeting on November 5?

Hon. Mr. Bartolucci: There's absolutely no question that we on this side of the House believe in economic growth in northern Ontario. That's why we refocused the northern Ontario heritage fund. To date, we have invested \$117 million in 443 projects, which has generated an additional \$397 million of investment in northern Ontario and created in excess of 2,000 jobs.

With regard to the meeting the member speaks about, the Minister of Natural Resources, the member for the area, will be at that meeting.

PATHOLOGIST

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, 10 people are in prison or under some form of constraint based on the testimony of pathologist Charles Smith. In fact, every case that Smith has ever testified in is now under review. We already know that Charles Smith's work has led completely innocent people to spend years in jail. Will the McGuinty government call a full public inquiry into what went wrong and how this could have happened?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): On November 1, the chief coroner's office announced that there would be a review of 44 cases, and these cases will be prioritized. They will be reviewed by four external pathologists: the former chief medical examiner for Nova Scotia and Alberta, two professors of forensic pathology from the University of Sheffield, England, and the state pathologist for Northern Ireland. They are going to be reviewing the totality of the cases. If at any point in their review they have any information that they feel should be brought to the attention of the Ministry of the Attorney General, they will do so immediately, and we will be in a position to act quickly.

Mr. Hampton: The individual cases should be reviewed, but that doesn't answer the question. What was going on in your legal system, Ontario's legal system, that could be so twisted into obviously bad results?

I'll give you one example. Louise Reynolds was accused in 1997 of killing her seven-year-old daughter on the basis of an opinion provided by Smith. She spent two years in pre-trial custody, plus time in a halfway house, and was forced to put up her other daughter for adoption before prosecutors withdrew the charge in 2001. She's just one of the people whose lives were ripped apart by Dr. Smith, and there are many others.

Yes, all the individual cases need to be reviewed, but we need a public inquiry to figure out how this could have gone on in so many cases. What is systematically at fault within your ministry and within the criminal justice system that so many lives could be destroyed by this person? Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: When the person asking the question was the Attorney General and he was asked about matters that were before the court, matters that were being reviewed by the federal justice minister or matters that were before the chief coroner, he said that we can't rush to judgment. He said that we have to let due process run its course. I understand that he has come to some conclusions on these matters, but I'll tell you, I'm going to take the word of the chief coroner and the advice and the review of expert pathologists, and we're going to wait for the process to follow through its course. Along the way we are going to act, in the event that we get some evidence that in fact we should be acting. We are going to follow the chief coroner, not CSI Queen's Park, Mr. Hampton.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Attorney General. The member for Nickel Belt.

1520

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Just last Friday I met with my local Northumberland

Federation of Agriculture executive. I normally meet with them on a regular basis to keep me abreast of issues that affect them on their farms. I really appreciate it, and I want to thank them for doing that every two or three months. It's time well spent. We talk about a number of issues that are facing them in the everyday farming industry.

One of the questions that comes up over and over again is that conservation is very important to their families, to their farms and to the entire province. As you know, Madam Minister, farms are very energy-intensive, and with rising costs, farmers are looking for ways to cut their energy uses. Could you tell me how your ministry is helping farmers identify savings and conserve energy in their farm businesses?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): It's an excellent question from the member for Northumberland, who has always, I believe, demonstrated a very eager will to work with the agriculture community in his riding.

I'm happy to report to all members of the Legislature that at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs we work, along with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Hydro One, to assist farmers and producers with energy audits on their properties. We also have contributed to the design and development of an energy efficiency program for customers of Ag Energy Co-op. This is a \$650,000 program, and it's based on proven tactics for developing an operational culture of conservation that is based on education, outreach and demonstration. Also, we're involved in on-farm conservation, advice on equipment retrofits, and energy demand and consumption management.

Mr. Rinaldi: As you know, Minister, the use of energy is a major part of many farm operations, especially those with value-added processing, which we encourage them to do. Today's agribusiness must rely on the processing side to make business viable. Unfortunately, many of these processes are energy-intensive, especially in the food sector. Minister, can you tell me how your ministry is assisting our farmers and the farms in Northumberland county in finding ways and opportunities in these areas?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: We have held energy sessions at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference in October of this year, and we have assisted with the organization of a green energy session for these producers in May 2006. Also, our government has made the commitment to renewable energy projects, which include on-farm assessment of biodigesters and the installation of wind-generating equipment for the production of electricity. Most recently, we've passed regulations on net metering.

I was just reading the Ontario Farmer this morning, where they have a front-page article: "Metering Boosts Power Projects." It indicates the Ontario government is making it easier for homeowners, farmers and other businesses to generate their own power and send any surplus energy back to the hydro grid. The government

passed a regulation that allows for what is known as the net metering practice, which will allow for more small-scale energy producing, and the government has streamlined procedures to make accessing the grid more possible. So obviously we are working with the agricultural community and they are obviously pleased with the efforts that we're making.

LESLIE M. FROST CENTRE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. On Monday of this week, October 31, you met with representatives of the Frost Centre working committee. In July of this year, they delivered a report to Minister Phillips and thanked him for his support of their work, and they wanted to meet with the new minister responsible to discuss the recommendations.

On July 13, 2004, your government closed the Frost Centre with no warning, no consultation, and it has sat vacant ever since. The Frost Centre was an Amethyst Award-winning environmental education centre, and the closure of the centre shocked people not just in the community but across the province.

In response to the huge outcry at the closure of the Frost, your government established the Frost working committee. Minister, they need you to do your job. They have done a tremendous job, and they need to know from you: When are you going to produce the guidelines for the request for proposal for the future of the Frost Centre?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I want to thank the member for the question. Of course, I want to recognize the very fine work that was done by the Frost Centre working committee. It truly was a community effort, a group of people who came together. I know that my colleague from Peterborough, Jeff Leal, and my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka also worked to participate to make sure that was very successful.

On July 15, my colleague the Minister of Government Services received the recommendations. We've already accepted and in fact executed one of the recommendations, which was to allow and to enter into a contract with Algonquin Highlands for access to the boat launch facility. If that has not been signed, that will be signed within days, an agreement to allow that kind of access.

We are continuing to work, and in my meeting I did follow up with the two members from the Frost Centre working committee on putting together the request for proposal to go out, as recommended in their report, as soon as possible.

Ms. Scott: I do appreciate the support from all sides of the Legislature on the development of the future of the Frost Centre.

The minister still has not answered the question. The buildings are sitting vacant, and the longer they sit, they more they deteriorate. The committee wants to stay involved and has offered their assistance, and there is a

lot of assistance within the community and the province for this, but the people who want to make the request for proposals want to act soon. They're wasting time and money. They're anxious for the guidelines to be produced. I would ask again if we could get some type of close time frame within this year for the request for proposals to go out, and then a timeline that might be involved for when the acceptance would be notified. As I said, we don't want to get into two years of vacant buildings at the Frost Centre.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The committee worked very diligently and in fact gave their report. Within days of receiving the report, we began to act upon the recommendations. I don't think we could move faster than we did. I can tell you that the members of the committee who did meet with me on Monday were incredibly pleased that we are proceeding with the request for proposal. We will be taking on the technical specifications as outlined by the committee members, putting that in and making sure that we have a fair opportunity, as laid out by the Frost Centre working committee: the kinds of terms and conditions around ownership, around usage, around all of those terms and conditions, as well as the need to bring the systems and the buildings into a state of repair.

We have not put a specific date around that, although I have committed to make absolute best efforts to make that as short as possible so that we could turn around and, if there is the interest with another partner out in the community—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Madam Minister, today a whole bunch of people came here from the Ontario public service to lobby you and other MPPs. They were joined by the parents and guardians of those who are in group homes and regional centres. They have told the MPPs and you that there are 6,000 people on the waiting list for community services, most of whom have aging parents who are no longer able to care for them. They have told you that you have exacerbated the problems by removing 1,000 high-needs individuals from long-term homes. They have told you the agencies have less staff. They have told you the police are more and more being called in. They have told you that you are precipitating a crisis in their lives.

My question to you: Why are you forcing poor, vulnerable people from their homes in the midst of injunctions, court challenges and other legal challenges when you have no plan to provide the necessary support for their transition?

1530

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I hope some of those I met with as well are here

in the House today. I want to say a very special welcome to people who work in the developmental services sector. Let me say that these are extremely committed individuals. People who work in developmental services do it because they want to be there, because they have a skill set that is very much required, and we want to retain that.

The people I met with in my office for a couple of hours this morning—we had a great conversation. We talked about the historic investments this government has made in the last two years alone. I will start by reminding the member opposite that since we became the government we have made virtually \$200 million more available than the previous governments. I also acknowledge—you would be interested—that your party, when you were the government, and the opposition party when they were the government too have increased funding in this sector since the mid-1980s. I acknowledged that as well.

Mr. Prue: Madam Minister, significant investment in this sector is essential, yet the clients are being displaced from their homes as we speak. They are being displaced from the homes they have known all of their lives. Their families have been forced to fight you in court. You are like a bulldozer to them, flattening their lives.

Madam Minister, many of them have asked—and I'm going to ask you directly. They are looking for your help, not what you are doing. They remember the Sandra Pupatello who used to be on this side of the House, who fought for the poor and the vulnerable. Now they're seeing a Sandra Pupatello on that side of the House who does not stand up for those same people. They need your help. When can they expect the Sandra Pupatello of old?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Before I ask for a response, I want to remind members that we refer to people in this place by their title, Minister, or by their riding, not by their given names.

Minister.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The member opposite needs to be clear in the House today. If he is suggesting that we don't close the institutions, he needs to say so, because there were people here today to talk to us about being opposed to the closure of institutions. Let me make it perfectly clear: Every government since the mid-1980s has closed institutions, including the NDP government. So please be clear with people, when they are talking to you, about your record as well.

I am in favour of closing institutions. I make no bones about this. I have also said, not just today for people coming to Queen's Park but repeatedly, regardless of the community I am in, that we are working diligently to make sure resources are available for people who need them in developmental services. We are working long and hard to be certain that there is more and more funding in special services at home, in people who live independently in the community, for specialized services for those people who need extra special care because of a medical condition—

The Speaker: Thank you.

SMART METERS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, I was happy to hear as you introduced your new bill today that it has something in it for smart metering.

The municipality of Chatham-Kent, which makes up part of my riding, has been running a pilot program for smart meter technology and is working with a Vancouver-based company to test a two-way, real-time wireless network. This technology will enable municipalities to retrofit existing metres so that they can reuse those meters rather than throwing them away. The cost of this technology is proposed to be at least 50% less than having to buy new meters. Hugh Brigden, who is the manager of stations and metering at Chatham-Kent Hydro, and is with us today in the gallery, has told us that the calls are overwhelming for this kind of metering.

Minister, how are you using the experiences of other projects—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): There is a question. Minister.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I would like to thank the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, not only for her support of the Chatham–Kent project, but also for her support in the agricultural community. She has been steadfast and tenacious on many issues.

To say the least, I've been absolutely delighted with the project at Chatham–Kent. They have been very innovative in their approach, as many others have in the smart metering. I'll give you some examples. There's Middleton, Woodstock, Wasaga, Oakville, Cambridge, North Dumfries—and I think maybe some special recognition to Newmarket. Newmarket Hydro, actually, is involving Enbridge for gas and the town of Newmarket for water metering. I can tell you that all of that intellectual capital that comes from these incredible people who work in the local distribution companies will not go amiss. I'm actually going to ask my parliamentary assistant to take over the job I had as parliamentary assistant to ensure this continues.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): To the minister: The smart meter is very important because it's going to educate us on how to conserve, and of course, by conserving energy, we are going to provide additional energy to the industry, which will become potentially more beneficial and more economical, and in the best interests of Ontarians.

Minister, in my riding of Thornhill there is an industry that I visited in April 2004 that produces smart meters. What kind of economic benefit can my constituents and those across Ontario expect from the implementation of smart meter legislation?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Thank you to the member from Thornhill for his question, who also has been unwavering in his support of conservation.

The economic benefits of this billion-dollar investment will actually be tremendous. We can expect addi-

tional manufacturing in the province. As a matter of fact, as you heard just recently, we had DMI, who has moved from Fargo, North Dakota, to Fort Erie with a new wind turbine plant: 100 jobs. In addition to the smart metering, it will provide a platform for employment. There's a good example: Just this morning Electric City Corp. announced that it has entered into an agreement with Enersource Hydro Mississauga to develop its industry-leading automatic power curtailment system. I saw this program working. It is phenomenal. It's actually a quarter-million dollar investment by Enersource in the energy-saver global commander units, resulting in extraordinary electricity—

The Speaker: Thank you.

MORTGAGE BROKERS

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, a bullish real estate market and a sharp upsurge in mortgage fraud and identity theft are creating landmines for lawyers, lenders and consumers. A recent article in the Canadian Lawyer states that there are no security measures to cover personal security packages for Terraview accounts that allow access to Ontario's e-registration system.

When is the government going to revise the Mortgage Brokers Act, which hasn't been revised in 20 years, to close the loopholes for fraudulent activity and restore confidence in the land registry system?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'm glad to hear a Tory acknowledge there's growth in housing, growth in housing sales and the economy is doing well. Finally, a Tory who knows what he's talking about—sometimes, sometimes.

Now, let me tell you, in eight years, when he was in government, they didn't do anything, despite repeated requests. My predecessor, Mr. Sorbara, began a consultation on that very statute. I have the benefit of the work he's already done as I assume this portfolio, and I can show the member that as our economy grows, as our housing grows and as the boom continues, this government is doing something you failed to do in eight years: to look seriously at the Mortgage Brokers Act. I can say to the member that we will be addressing that question in the very near future, in a way that you failed to do in eight long, painful years in this province.

Mr. Tascona: Minister, Ontario accounted for almost one half of the mortgage approvals in 2004 in Canada. The Mortgage Brokers Act, which has not been revised for over 20 years, needs increased standards, including mandatory errors and omissions insurance and full disclosure for consumers. However, bank mortgage activity is not covered by the Mortgage Brokers Act. Minister, what steps will you take to ensure a level playing field for mortgage brokers so that consumers are not at the mercy of banks for mortgage approvals?

1540

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We're doing something that was kind of foreign to their government. We've been consulting the industry. They never did that in eight years. That consultation took over a year, I think, in 2004. The former parliamentary assistant tells me that.

I can assure the member opposite that this government will act in a way that their government never acted. It's too bad he didn't ask this question in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003. We're moving, and we're going to do what's in the best interests of consumers and mortgage brokers, for the people of Ontario, something you failed to do in eight long and painful years.

PETITIONS

PUBLIC ACCOUNTING STANDARDS

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas Bill 213, Justice Statute Law Amendment Act, 2002, enacted the Limitations Act, 2002, which provides for a reduction in the legal limitation period, from six to two years;

"Whereas the two-year limitation period in effect from January 1, 2004, is not long enough for investors seeking restitution after suffering serious financial damages due to the wrongdoing of the financial services industry; and

"Whereas the Attorney General's position is that the plaintiff investor interests do not need further protection;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the provincial government immediately pass and implement an amendment to the Limitations Act, 2002, to provide an exemption for claims by victims of financial services industry wrongdoing so that no time limitation period applies to such claims."

I support the petition and sign it.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas the previous Conservative government eliminated many of the rights of union workers that took many years to gain;

"Whereas the McGuinty government passed into law the Labour Relations Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, that is bringing back card-based certification for construction workers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support the McGuinty government's commitment to restoring peace and protecting workers' rights in the construction industry."

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it, and I give it to page Mandy Min.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my name in full support.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls, signed by many people, including Don and Irene Hallett. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most" individuals "and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I'm pleased to put my signature on this petition.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by a great number of my residents, and it comes from Community Living Tillsonburg.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my signature, as I totally agree with it.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition sent to me from a group of residents in Brampton, Caledon and Maple, Ontario. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly. It deals with the contributions of newcomers to Canada, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and ask page Mandy Min to carry it for me.

LESLIE M. FROST CENTRE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): "Recommendations for the Frost Centre

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government announced the closure of the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resources Centre in July 2004 with no public consultation; and

"Whereas public outrage over the closure of the Frost Centre caused the government to appoint a working committee of local residents to examine options for the future of the property; and

"Whereas the working committee has completed their consultations and has prepared recommendations for the provincial government that include a procedure to follow during the request for proposals process; and

"Whereas the Frost Centre has been an important educational resource for the community, and continued use of the facility for educational purposes has widespread support;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should retain public ownership of the Frost Centre lands and follow the recommendations of the working committee regarding the request for proposals process."

This is signed by many people from my riding and from Ontario, and I want to hand it to page Kiki Kirkpatrick from Millbrook/South Cavan Public School in my riding.

MANDATORY RETIREMENT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads:

"End Mandatory Retirement

"Whereas existing legislation in Ontario enforcing mandatory retirement discriminates against healthy and able Ontario men and women on the basis that they are older than age 65; and

"Whereas the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have ended mandatory retirement in various forms; and

"Whereas ending mandatory retirement will enable many principal family income earners, especially among families of new Canadians and those headed by single mothers, to maintain their careers, earn incomes, support their families and contribute to society; and

"Whereas Ontario faces a labour shortage in the coming years as skilled knowledge workers and tradespeople approach retirement age, and Ontario companies do not wish to lose their investment in the skills and experience of their most senior people;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario should abolish mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario through the swift passage of Bill

211, an Act to amend the Human Rights Code to end mandatory retirement."

I agree with this petition, and I affix my signature to it and give it to page Trevor to be delivered.

1550

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current government has eliminated OHIP coverage for chiropractic services; and

"Whereas the current government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for optometry services; and

"Whereas the current government has eliminated and reduced OHIP coverage for physiotherapy services; and

"Whereas the current government has refused to fund treatment for autistic children even after the courts and human rights commission ruled it should; and

"Whereas the current government has now decided to fund sex change operations even though the Canada Health Act deems it not an essential health service;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario does not fund sex change operations and reinstates funding for delisted health services."

I affix my name and fully support it.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective

access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I'm pleased to sign this petition.

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I put my signature as well to support this petition.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to

receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I am pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Mississauga West.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's good to have the last word during petition time.

I'm pleased to support my seatmate, the member from Niagara Falls, with this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet) there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I am pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition, and ask page Frances to carry it to the table for me.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 2, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): It's time for questions and comments. The Chair recognizes the member from Mississauga West.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): This is not a contentious bill; it is one that enjoys widespread support throughout the House.

The objects of the bill are fairly simple. We know that children are more likely to thrive when they're part of a permanent, nurturing family. Bill 210 is all about making it easier for children who really do need protection to

find a loving and caring home. When children are in a loving and caring home, they're more likely to be better adjusted as people, to grow up into more stable and adaptive adults, and to form strong relationships. They do better in school. Bill 210 allows for the expansion of family-based care options, and that means that more children have the opportunity for a happy childhood and for long-term success.

Why was this bill introduced? Very simply, the current system is just too rigid. What we need to have here in Ontario is a system that meets the needs of the child; meets the needs where the rules fit the child, instead of the child fitting the rules.

The Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, makes it easier for children in need of protection to find a permanent home. How does it do this? Very simply, it makes adoption more flexible. It allows more children to be adopted while still maintaining ties to their birth family and to the community from which they arose. It makes it easier for relatives, which includes grandparents, to provide permanent homes for those children and youth who need a permanent home. We all know how valuable our roots are to us and how fondly we remember those roots as we grow up. This bill is about having a child be able to remember the roots that they grew up in, instead of going from one to another to another home.

Finally, this bill creates more legal options beyond traditional adoptions so children and youth in care can be placed in a permanent home. I thank you for the time.

1600

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I look forward to participating in the debate more fully, but I did want to just make the comment that it is rare that we have legislation in the House that I believe all three parties will be supporting.

We have concern regarding some of the specifics of this legislation, which is why we are encouraging the government to have fulsome committee hearings on this legislation. We need to hear from stakeholders. We need to hear from families, from foster parents, as to what their experience is, what the problems are within the current system. We need to hear as well from children who have experienced this process. I'm hoping that when we go to committee, we will in fact accommodate a setting where we have that kind of information available to us so that we can improve on the bill before us and ensure that it is indeed practical.

The other comment I want to make is that it's easy to make legislation; the challenge is in its implementation and, more important, the resources that the government puts behind that implementation. This government is very good at making announcements, introducing new legislation, but unfortunately very short in terms of providing those resources to ensure that the objective and the goal that was pronounced can in fact be realized. So we'll be watching very carefully to see how this government responds to that important need for resourcing this piece of legislation.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto—Danforth): I, too, will be speaking at further length to this bill later, but I agree that many of the issues were discussed when this bill was debated before, and indeed the three parties support this bill.

I was fortunate enough to go to the announcement. The member for Hamilton Mountain was the minister in charge at the time and I still wonder why she was removed from that ministry, because I actually want to compliment her. I believe the former minister of children's issues tried very hard, behind the scenes, with her own government to do more for children with autism. She's a member who is a team player and did it behind the scenes. I think she worked hard for the children of this province and was unable to get any further. I believe that's why she was removed. There's no proof of that, but I think it's very sad that a minister who wanted to do more for children—and I believe was making some advancements, despite Liberal broken promises—was removed from that portfolio.

I was at the announcement, and I know that the previous minister worked very hard. I was fortunate enough that day to hear young people and their foster parents or adoptive parents talk about the difference it makes to young people to have that consistency in their lives, to be able to go and live with a family and become adopted and become part of that family, that it means absolutely everything to have that kind of security. So I think this is an important bill in that sense.

I will speak later about some of the issues we're hearing about and some of the problems with this piece of legislation, but also some of the things that are not in the bill that we believe should have been put in. Further consultation is needed. So again, I'll speak more in a little bit on this.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): This is one of those very interesting bills. It's one that I can find great support for, yet I would like to know more about how it's going to operate.

The basic purpose of this bill would ease and help many children in the province to find some kind of solid relationship in a family environment, and those things are very important. As a community, as a society, we should do everything we can to ensure that those kinds of things come together.

I understand that we are dealing with approximately 9,000 children who are in the permanent care of the children's aid society. These children cannot be adopted until they sever all relationships with their family. In some cases, that can be a difficult and in fact a very sad occasion. Maintaining relationships with a family can prepare someone for any eventuality that may happen in the future. Situations that currently exist in the family which make living at home impossible may change. As those things change, the flexibility of the children's aid society would be a very important part of this bill.

However, the government seems to lack a lot of detail in the overall planning of this bill and how it tends to protect vulnerable children. This summer and early fall

we've been informed by the newspapers of that terrible, terrible case where a young child was actually starved to death. Making sure that those things don't happen in this province is very, very important and falls on the shoulders of all people in this House.

The Acting Speaker: It is time for a response. The Chair recognizes the member for Brant.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to do the wrap-up, as it's called, on the speech that I gave last night. I want to thank the members from Mississauga West, Oak Ridges, Toronto—Danforth and Halton for their input.

One of the things I want to come back to is what I chose as a theme last night, and that was, let's make sure we understand that this is an evolution and that successive governments have tried to do their best in order to protect our children. I gave credit to each and every member in this House in a passionate way—maybe I was too over the top, because some people misinterpreted what I said as criticizing an individual member for not doing that. Nothing could be further from the impression that I tried to leave, and that was that there is not a single person in this House who has not put the needs of children front and centre whenever we've dealt with issues of this nature. So I complimented and I continue to compliment all members for trying to do that.

The other point I wanted to make was that quite clearly the member from Oak Ridges tried to imply that in some way they were the ones who said that we have to go to committee. It was first said immediately by the minister—immediately by the minister—that she wanted this to go to committee to receive the expert advice that's necessary. I want to make sure the members understand clearly that that has been identified and it must be done and it will be done. We have identified that and we've said that it must be done.

Further, to the member from Halton, it's unfortunate—we have to make sure we understand that when any one government is in the rule of the day, things are going to happen in every single aspect of the province of Ontario. No one sets out to create the problems we've heard in the newspaper, specifically about what's been going on with individuals in the care of the CAS. No one government would ever set out to cause those problems. We must get out of the mindset that we can lay blame at the feet of somebody if there's not culpability to that. Let's work toward making our kids safer in Ontario.

I appreciate the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Klees: To the member from Brant, I want to reassure him that I wasn't in any way suggesting that the government wasn't willing to have committee hearings; my emphasis was on the scope of those hearings. All too often, we hear that there are going to be committee hearings and then we're limited to one day, or we're limited to half a day, or we're limited to committee hearings here at Queen's Park and we don't have the appropriate travel time to ensure that we make it possible for people throughout this huge province of ours to have

their input. That was the reason for my emphasis on these committee hearings.

Also, I find it interesting that the member protests so strongly that we shouldn't be blaming a particular government for anything that goes wrong. Goodness, all people have to do is look at Hansard, and people who watch these proceedings with any regularity know that with every question that's ever asked of any minister, it is always the previous government or governments that they blame. They're now reaching back 15 years to blame the former NDP government or the former Tory government for their inability to keep their own promises.

1610

Ms. Churley: Even Peterson.

Mr. Klees: Today they reach back to Peterson. I agree with the member from Brant that governments should assume responsibility for their actions. They are the government. Whatever happens on their watch is their responsibility and it would be nice, it would be proper for this government to begin to assume that responsibility, to realize that they have been there, that they have sat around the cabinet table. The prince of broken promises has been the leader of this province now for more than two years. This is what he looks at when he opens the newspapers in the morning today. This is the province and these issues are his. He has to assume responsibility. That's all we were saying.

I want to speak to the bill before us. I've been in this Legislature now for almost 12 years—1995, that's 10 years. It seems longer than that, but 10 years. The issue of child welfare is one that we have dealt with many times. I'm actually proud of the history of our government in terms of putting resources into child welfare and behind children's aid society work. From 1995 on, until 2003, funding on child protection was increased by some 185% over that period of time, to beyond \$1 billion.

The amount of training that was done: The previous government recognized the importance of ensuring that we have people in the field who are involved on the front lines with children and their protection and have responsibility for them, and that they're appropriately trained. Over that same period of time, some 7,700 children's aid society workers were trained, and upgraded in their training, for work they do on the front lines. Some 1,800 more child protection workers were hired over that same period of time. In retrospect, we look back over the last 10 years and we take great pride in the emphasis the previous government put on children in this province.

The bill before us seeks to improve on the current situation. I'll be the first one to say that things are not perfect, and that there's a lot of room for improvement. That's why I commend the government for bringing this bill forward. I don't feel the same way about many other pieces of legislation this government brings forward, but certainly on this one we find some common ground. I'm prepared to endorse that.

I have some concerns, though, and this is where I believe that when we get into committee we can begin to

look at some of these details. One of the areas that concerns me specifically is the resources. I believe the number now is about \$70 million that children's aid societies are in deficit in this province today. I have visits from representatives of the York region and Simcoe children's aid societies in my office on occasion, and I hear about their struggles. I say to the minister that I think what would be prudent is that before we take on additional responsibility for implementing yet an additional layer of legislation and regulation, we look at what we're doing today and ensure that we're properly resourced so that we can deal with the issues we have today. We're not doing that. Your government is not doing that. There isn't enough money available to the children's aid societies to be able to pay their workers, to retain their workers so that the work that needs to be done on the front lines can be done efficiently and effectively.

In the short time I have available to me I want to emphasize this in terms of the responsibility that I believe the ministry has, the minister has and government has in terms of not only resourcing through financial support of these agencies but ensuring that the people working on the front lines are the best we can possibly have and are properly supervised, that there is a level of accountability in place in these agencies so that we can avoid the tragedy we have been reading about in the newspapers over the last number of months.

For the purpose of emphasis as we consider this legislation, I want to refer to circumstances that are unconscionable. I won't go into any details but I will read this. It was in the *Globe and Mail* this past Monday. When I read things like this, it just brings home how important the work is that the minister has and the work that the government has yet to do to ensure that our children are properly protected. I know she has the same concern as I do and as other members have in this Legislature. I'll just read it into the record:

"Ms. Reed, a young woman from Acton, Ont., was the driving force behind the memorial"—this is the memorial for the young child who died of starvation, Jeffrey Baldwin. "The little boy who so infrequently felt the sun on his face was remembered on a golden late-fall day in a city park near the house where on Nov. 30, 2002, he died of starvation."

The woman goes on to say—it says, "... the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto" who is being held "accountable for its failures in the case." I'm not going to prejudge what is happening in the courts today, but any one of us who has been following this story will certainly know that there were at least three different occasions where serious errors in judgment were made by the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto in terms of the placement of these children and allowing them to be under the care of people who were previously criminally convicted. Yet these children were exposed to them under the care, the responsibility, of the children's aid society.

As we consider this, on the one hand, as the minister indicated when she introduced the bill, the purpose of

Bill 210 is to make adoptions more flexible, to take away, hopefully, some of the red tape that's involved today that makes it difficult for some of these adoptions to take place, and so children are left in limbo. They don't know where they are, and they have a difficult time being able to find their stability and security because they belong nowhere. I support that in principle. My concern, in doing that, is that we not liberalize this process so much that we lose sight of the accountability mechanisms that are so important, the research that needs to be done, the background checks that need to be done to ensure that those people who are considering the adoptions are in fact legitimately capable of being good parents.

1620

I support the minister's initiative for kinship support. No one would support in a stronger way than I—if there are grandparents or if there are siblings in a family, does it not make sense that if those grandparents are willing to step in and assume a parenting role, they should be allowed to do that, and that rather than government standing in the way and creating hurdles for that to take place, there should be a facilitation of that? But again, there is the responsibility, because in the case that I refer to, it was grandparents who were guilty in the final analysis of allowing this tragedy to happen. So we in this place have a responsibility, as we consider the legislation before us, to ensure that those safeguards are in place.

I want to also read into the record a letter I received in my constituency office not too long ago. This again is my concern: that we ensure we always keep in mind that it's the best interests of the child and the best interests of the parents that we always have in mind and that we don't allow bureaucracy or the regulations to get so much in the way that we don't do what is right for the child as a priority.

This is a young girl aged 13, and she says to me in her letter, "I am desperately asking your help so that I can come out from hiding and to return to my home and family and to go back to school where I belong."

"I am currently in hiding because the CAS has threatened and abused me and my family." She goes on to say the children's aid society "has obtained an apprehension warrant for me ... without any information being given to the judge from me or my family. The chances are very good that they lied to the justice of the peace so that they could force me back into CAS control where they could silence me."

I'll close the quotation there. This is a very disturbing letter. The point I want to make here is that there is a role for agencies such as the children's aid society to step in and be the protector of the very innocent children in our society. We know that abuse happens. What we can't do is allow a bureaucracy to develop and things to become so regulatorily burdensome that we lose sight of the very people the legislation or the regulations are intended to help.

With regard to this young woman in my constituency, it's a struggle for me as a member of provincial Parliament because she comes to me and appeals to me to help

her, and the very agency that government is paying to support and protect her I now have to question. I have to do my due diligence to ensure that the right thing is being done here.

Again, as we consider this legislation before us, I want to ask the minister to be very vigilant in terms of ensuring that the appropriate safeguards are in place and that we do what has to be done for the benefit of these children.

In the closing moments I have available to me, I want to shift focus to another group of children in this province who I believe are being neglected and who I believe this government has turned its back on. I have done a great deal of work over the last number of months with parents of autistic children. Along with my colleague Julia Munro, I travelled to Michigan and we visited a school there in Marysville. This is a school that, quite frankly, I think we should be looking at in this province as an example of what can be done for children with multiple disabilities and challenges.

It is shameful that the Premier of this province, while he was seeking office, promised these parents in no uncertain terms that if he was elected as Premier, he would extend services to autistic children beyond the age of six. He has failed to do that. He has now been the Premier for more than two years and he still has not delivered on that promise. In fact, he is challenging a court decision that has ordered the government to provide those services. Rather than keeping his promise and using that court order to justify the additional cost it may place on the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Community and Social Services, instead of doing that, he has instructed his Attorney General to appeal that decision—unconscionable.

So while, on the one hand, we have the minister with responsibility for children's services coming forward with legislation in support of children, we have the Premier, on the other hand, breaking a promise to autistic children and their parents on something that can be done tomorrow in terms of extending services. We have autistic children on waiting lists, waiting for simply one opportunity, and that is to be treated fairly and equally in the same way as children who don't have the same disability.

If there's anything we should be doing in this province, it's demonstrating that we don't treat people differently, regardless of disability, regardless of colour, regardless of sex and regardless of race. Surely that is what we can be proud of as Ontarians. In this case, on behalf of those autistic children, this Premier and this government are failing; they're failing to live up to that standard that we, as Ontarians, have come to know.

I trust they will consider doing the right thing in the interests of fairness and equality.

The Acting Speaker: It is time for questions and comments.

Ms. Churley: I am pleased to follow up and make some comments on the remarks made by the member for Oak Ridges. I must say that, overall, I think we all like

the tone of this debate because we're talking, as the member said, about our precious children. It is true that although we criticize each other from time to time about not doing enough and about doing things better and differently, it is, as the member said, the one area—I think all members are saying—where we can come together and say that we are in full support of doing everything we can to improve the lives of children in this province, particularly children who, through no fault of their own, because of difficult family situations or whatever, end up in situations where they need the care of the children's aid. That is why this bill before us today is so important. As the member pointed out—and I will speak to it. I know our critic spoke to it in our lead on this, the member for Hamilton—west?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): East.

Ms. Churley: East. Thank you. She's going to kill me. But I didn't say "Hamilton Mountain."

It's been promised that there will be hearings on this and there will be further consultation. The main criticism we've heard about this bill comes from aboriginal groups who want to be consulted further, and others who feel that there should be more added to the scope of this bill. I recognize that one bill can't always open up a whole act and do everything. As the minister knows, once you start opening up an act that has flaws and needs some changes, we need to look at everything we can possibly do while that act is being opened up, because who knows when it will be again. So I'll be speaking to some of those issues in a few minutes.

1630

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I appreciate the comments that have been made by the members for Oak Ridges and Toronto—Danforth. In particular to the member for Oak Ridges, I want to remind him that Martin McNamara, who is the executive director of the York Region Children's Aid Society, said that this bill will help take child protection and safety to the next level. I am sure he is quite familiar with the children in question.

The goal of this bill is to put the needs of children first, and it's a very honourable goal. It's also making adoption more flexible for children and less difficult for the prospective adoptive parents. As we know, there have been a number of occasions where members of a family have had difficulty adopting the children of their families. Therefore, certainly, the bill deserves significant support because of the objective of the bill.

We should also underline that the minister has added a budget increase of about 10%, or \$95 million, to last year's budgeted figure. Again, this is certainly a strong commitment to children. I don't have to remind members that on the education side for children, we have added significant money to add a significant number of teachers to the education system so that our children will have a better education.

In addition to that, I personally had the pleasure of making an announcement in regard to additional funding that this government has provided to schools to make

sure that food is available in some of the schools where there are some extra challenges, where parents unfortunately, for whatever reason, are not able to take care of their kids early in the morning. So this government has worked significantly for children, and Bill 210 is a continuation of that.

Mr. Chudleigh: The member for Oak Ridges raises an interesting point about the autism promises. I had occasion last week to have lunch with a couple who had an autistic child. The child looked about seven or eight years old. They were from California. Actually, they were married and their child was born in Botswanaland, South Africa, but they moved to the United States because of care for their child. This child was in a school in California. There were seven children in his class and there were six teachers or assistant teachers in that class. It was almost a one-to-one ratio that this child was receiving, and each of those teachers had a specialty that they applied to this child. I would think that is an extremely expensive system but one that would be very helpful for that young person to go through and receive the very best of care and treatment. He would probably be as good a citizen of the United States as he could possibly be in the future.

This whole bill becomes very personal to me. When I was very young, my parents passed away early and I was a ward of the court for about six months. During that period of time, there was a great deal of difficulty—I was shielded from a lot of this, of course—as to where I would live and with whom I would live and whether or not those people were acceptable. As it turned out, I was able to live with a maiden aunt, someone who had never been married before. She inherited two teenaged boys at the ripe old age of 49. I'm sure that wasn't something that she expected in her life, but I can tell you we had a wonderful time growing up in our later teenaged years, with my aunt being more like one of us than a parent at that time. She did a marvellous job.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): I listened to the member from Oak Ridges and, as always, he's quite articulate in what he has to say.

Mr. Delaney: The member is always articulate.

Mr. Prue: Yes; I think, "He's always articulate," is more correct.

Of all his comments, what seized me most was his discussion of the government's insistence on taking the parents of children with autism to court. I have to tell you, I continue to be shocked at the actions of this government in terms of what was said when they were in opposition and what was said during the time of the election about what they were going to do for autistic children, and now to find that those selfsame families are being forced to go through the court system.

On Halloween night, as I was giving out some candies, one of my neighbours came by with her son. Her son has autism. He was brilliantly dressed in a costume, and he was, of course, anxious, I think, to get some candy, just like every other child. I asked her how things were going, because she has been to my office and we

have tried our best to help her. She told me that she was fearful. She didn't know what was going to happen with the court challenge, of which she was now seized into as well. She didn't know what was going to happen because her son was about to turn six years of age, and all of this had had a tremendous stress upon her and her family. She told me that she was no longer at work. She's had to take stress leave. They are finding it very difficult. She almost started to cry on what should have been a very happy occasion, going door to door with her son, meeting neighbours. I wished her well, and I told her we would continue to fight.

I would ask the government to think about that woman and the thousands like her. You should not be taking them to court; you should be helping them.

The Acting Speaker: In response, the Chair recognizes the member from Oak Ridges.

Mr. Klees: I want to thank my colleagues the members from Beaches-East York, Halton, Toronto-Danforth and Thornhill. In my closing comments, I want to again thank the government for bringing this forward, but I cannot allow this government to take accolades for a new piece of legislation focused on children without balancing that with the reality that this government has within its power and its authority to change the lives of children and parents today simply by doing what they said they were going to do, and that is to extend benefits to those autistic children.

We cannot allow ourselves to be blinded. We can't allow ourselves to just simply turn the page. It's easy for us. When we close the door on our constituency offices and thank those parents and those children for coming—or, as the member from Beaches-East York said, when he closed the door and they went on their way—it's no longer in our minds. If we allow ourselves to think that way, then we can pat ourselves on the back for passing new legislation, and that becomes the focus.

My challenge today to the minister and to this government is to put this legislation on a solid foundation, and that foundation is first of all to keep your promise to that identified group of children you are well familiar with, and that you will do the fair and the just thing for those children.

1640

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes, in further debate, the member from Toronto-Danforth.

Ms. Churley: I stand here with a heavy heart today because of—as the previous members have referred—little Jeffrey Baldwin. Although the legislation before us today doesn't directly impact or affect that particular situation—although in some ways it does—I must say that it's very difficult to talk about protecting our children within this bill or with any bill.

I know the Minister of Children and Youth Services came to the memorial for little Jeffrey Baldwin in my riding. I have to hand it to Christie Blatchford, who is a writer for The Globe and Mail. I must say, Christie and I don't always agree on everything. She's a fantastic writer. She came to that memorial for little Jeffrey and

she wrote the most incredible, positive story about him. She brought him alive. She talked about the people who were there. It was a beautiful fall day, and the memorial for him was held in a park close to where he lived. There were people and women and families there with their children. We stood around and there was a maple tree planted in his memory with a little bench and a plaque. There weren't a lot of speeches at this thing. The emergency workers showed up, the people who first arrived when the 911 number was called and tried to revive him, the first to discover the horror of what had been happening to him.

I don't know about you, but I have to speak about Jeffrey Baldwin because he was from my riding. This happened in my backyard; it happened in all of our backyards. It's so horrible. For a while, like many of us, I think I turned a blind eye to it. People like Christie Blatchford was going to the court every day and writing about it and facing up to the horrors of what happened to that little boy and to his sister who was kept in that room. Little Jeffrey wasn't just starved to death; much, much worse happened to him before he died. Again, I'm not going to go into the details here, but I think we all have to face it and we all have to know what happened to Jeffrey Baldwin in that room in that home, to his little sister, who was kept in that room with him, and to his other siblings, who had to watch it happen. It is absolutely horrific, and when you read it, you can't stand it. It's actual torture to imagine that anybody—what monsters. What kind of monsters—what happened to them—could do the kinds of things that we are reading about that happened to this poor little boy? Everything was taken from him.

We're hearing more and more about it and, of course, we know that there's a court case going on and these facts are coming out, and it's so incredibly heartbreaking. I don't even know at this point, Minister, what to ask you to do. It's just so incomprehensible. I know that there's a court case, and I'm sure there'll be a coroner's inquest into this one. We need to look at what went wrong in the system. Of course, we know that the workers in the Toronto's Children's Aid Society work very hard. They have enormous portfolios and client bases. They work very hard. None of us want to attack these workers who, day in and day out, go into these homes and try to help children. But something went very wrong here. The workers themselves admit it: Something went wrong. We don't know the full implications yet, but they didn't check the files of the grandparents.

We must make sure that this never happens again. It does, from time to time, although this is one of the more horrific situations I've ever seen and heard about and it's hard to believe that it happened here in Canada, here in Ontario, here in my riding. But it did. Little Jeffrey completely slipped through the cracks and was hidden away from us successfully and ended up with no life, and then dying of starvation.

I wanted to pay tribute to Jeffrey Baldwin today. That's all we can do now. I invite people to go to Green-

wood Park in my riding at Greenwood and Dundas. Near the playground area where little Jeffrey never got to play in his short life, near the baseball field and near the playground, is the tribute to Jeffrey, and I invite people to go by. It's a beautiful spot. I think that now is an opportunity for us all—Jeffrey's gone; he's not with us any more—to acknowledge his short life.

I've been wanting to say this for some time. I made a statement shortly after I went to the ceremony last Sunday. I don't know at this point what we can do about it, but certainly we all have to figure out what we can do. With the minister, the government, we in opposition, working with Catholic children's aid and children's aid in general, what happened and what can we do to make sure that what happened to little Jeffrey will never happen to another child under our watch? He should have been under our watch, and something went wrong.

I want to talk a bit about the bill before us. It's fitting that it's before us today because, speaking of adoption—this is a different issue—the bill we just passed, after my work of 10 years and other people's work for 30 years, opened up adoption records for adult adoptees and birth parents in this province, actually catching up to a lot of jurisdictions. That has passed and now we've got our work cut out for us to make sure that over the next 18 months, before it's implemented, all the pieces that need to be fixed through regulation are done and it turns out to be good for everybody concerned.

This bill today, of course, is a different kind of bill. It really doesn't deal with the same issues we dealt with around the opening up of records, the privacy issues and those kinds of things; in fact, it's sort of the opposite. As I understand it, having gone to the announcement by the minister and having heard a wonderful young man—I forget his name; I can still see him; red hair—talk about why this bill is important to him. Of course, what this is all about—it's more, but one of the aspects of this that's so important is that children should not be given up by their biological parents in order for them to be adopted. That biological connection is important, and there are all kinds of reasons. This young man spoke about why biological parents sometimes just can't cope. There's not always abuse involved. Sometimes there is; sometimes it's just because of circumstances in a parent's life that they can't cope. They can't raise the child. There are too many issues. Why should that parent have to give up custody of their child and give up any kind of contact with that child for the child to be adopted into the family they're living with?

One of the rules this takes care of is when children are in the care of the children's aid society whose birth families have a court-ordered right to visit or contact them, and more than half of these families never contact their children. The existing system, therefore, prevents about three quarters of Ontario's estimated 9,000 crown wards from being adopted. Statistics from the Adoption Council of Ontario suggest that the number of international adoptions has climbed to about 600 a year, while private

agencies in Ontario have placed 170 children with families.

Studies have shown that crown wards move from foster and group homes every 22 months on average and suffer changes in social workers almost as frequently. You've just got to know that this is not a good situation for growing children, who need stability in their lives. The bill, therefore, would provide for what's referred to as open adoption, so that birth parents and relatives will be able to maintain contact with the child.

As you know, and we talked about it within the context of the adoption disclosure bill, most adoptions that happen today at birth—there are fewer, of course, in this country, but most are open—a birth mother, a young woman who decides to give up for adoption, gets to pick the parents and the parents have to be interviewed frequently by the mother. The mother has got to feel comfortable about where her child is going. They negotiate and work out some kind of contact. That's become the norm in this day and age because everybody understands the importance of keeping that connection, and the damage it does when that connection is taken away.

1650

What I understand from this bill is that the extent of the contact negotiated among the adoptive parents, the birth parents and the children's aid society is to be negotiated. Bill 210 presumes that birth parents know that they won't lose track of what happens to their children after adoption. It will clear the way for crown wards to be adopted much sooner. We know that Alberta, British Columbia and New Brunswick already have and allow forms of open adoption, and such arrangements are common in private adoptions in Ontario, as I already said.

As you know from our members who have spoken and from our critic in this area, we are very supportive of this bill, but we are looking at possible amendments and a strong emphasis on public hearings. I heard from a speaker earlier today that we will have those. The bill's efforts toward permanency and planning seem relatively sound to us, but we have heard, as more and more people are reading about the bill, that stakeholders have concerns about the narrowness of the bill and the exclusivity of the consultation process to date. I'm therefore glad to hear that the government is planning on having public hearings.

As I pointed out already, this is really all about children, and whatever we do should be what's best for the children. We all know that children in care deserve safe and stable family arrangements, and this bill is a good first step toward broadening the range of options for children in care. Minister, the new Minister of Children and Youth Services, you've got to remember that the Ombudsman has called your ministry the "ministry of I don't know." I know that you're in there to make changes and that you need a bigger budget and that you want to be able to stand up and say you have that budget, you have the accountability and you have the authority to be accountable in this and in other regards when it comes to

children. We need a super-children's ministry that not only deals with these particular issues but that is there to stand up for children from every aspect we can think of: from environmental health issues to health issues to these kinds of issues we're talking about today. We need a very strong children's ministry to do that. I'm hoping that with a new minister in place, we're going to see changes and we're actually going to see a very beefed-up, very strong children's ministry. I'll be the first one to do anything I can to help her achieve that, as I'm sure anybody here would. We all agree that we need a strong advocacy ministry for children.

We do know, Minister, that several children's aid societies are in deficit positions. Children's aid societies absolutely have to be sustainable and accountable so they can be there for the children who need them. Ontario does need to do so much more to provide the resources necessary to implement the bill. I know that's always an issue when coming forward with new initiatives in new bills; there's always the resource issue: Where do you find it around that cabinet table? Where do you get the allocation of resources you need to ensure that your new legislation is as effective as I'm sure the minister wants it to be? Again, if the minister needs any help from us on this side to push for that so she can sit around the cabinet table and say, "Look, they're beating up on me here because I don't have enough resources to implement this properly," we'll be there to help her do that. She can hold me accountable to that—that is, if I'm still here in this place, given what is going on in Ottawa these days. I've got a double role here.

But I wanted to be here to speak to this bill today. As you know, I'm here every day doing my job, and in my community, frequently, just running back and forth between ridings. Of course the great divide of Coxwell Avenue—it's not like I have to run very far. Fortunately, Michael and I share many issues in the east end anyway. But I wanted to be here to speak to this issue—I don't know how much longer I'm going to be here—because it is so vitally important to me, as to all of us. I wanted to put in my two cents' worth and my analysis of the bill and what needs to be done. We know that there's a chance for amendments, and that's a good thing. It does not do enough to ensure a fair complaints process for children in care, their family and caregivers. We've heard that from others.

I know that your ministry has promised action to correct this measure, and that's a good thing. We understand that the alternative dispute resolution must be used very carefully and that the ministry must ensure checks and balances in this process.

The review of the Child and Family Services Act is a very good first step. But as I said earlier in my comments, it focuses on only one aspect of child welfare; it should focus on others as well. This is what I'm hoping the minister will do, and this is why I'm concerned.

I know; I've been a minister and I understand. I learned the hard way that when you open up a piece of legislation to make changes, the tide comes: Everybody

who wants changes wants them to happen while a bill is opened up because it's so hard within the legislative agenda, a government agenda, to get legislation before the House. You have to line up sometimes.

When you do open up a bill, it is really important to get as many changes as are appropriate and necessary done at that time. Who knows when you're going to have the opportunity to do that again? My colleagues and others have been talking about things like children with special needs who are inappropriately placed in CAS care, and children who age out; we hear a lot about that, and I don't have time to go into it, but they age out of care. They get to be over 18, and then they don't have adequate support. The ministry's own report from their review of the Child and Family Services Act did have comments on a wide range of issues which it immediately deemed outside the scope of their review, but those are very important issues that people have been raising for some time and that we simply must address.

I'm also going to talk about First Nations communities. You will hear this, and I know you heard it from others, from the NDP caucus. First Nations communities are particularly concerned about the lack of consultation on this bill. They're also concerned about the ability of the ministry to make changes affecting their children by regulation instead of legislation. This is a long-standing concern and issue with First Nations, Minister, as I'm sure you are aware. Again, I understand that you are meeting with them, if you have not done so, next Tuesday, and we all appreciate that.

You know that they have many concerns about the lack of consultation, what they would like to see and what their needs are when it comes to their rights as First Nations: sovereignty and self-determination in terms of child welfare. I want to say again that First Nations, like the rest of us, want to ensure that whatever is put in place is the best for the children of their communities. I'm sure they can come up with and present the minister with some very good ideas of what can be done to improve the scope of this bill so that their concerns are dealt with.

In closing, I just want to say that there are many issues that the member for Beaches—East York will go into that I didn't. He has a particular focus. He will bring them up again. I know that the bill was warmly received by CAS agencies and adoption groups and that CAS agencies had a great deal of input into the bill. But as more and more people looked at it and got a sense of the scope of the bill, we started to hear that they needed to be consulted more, that they wanted public hearings and that they want us or the government, all of us, to put forward some amendments to strengthen this bill that we all support, that we want to see go forward. We all want to make sure that the bill is the very best it can be to protect our vulnerable children in this province.

1700

The Acting Speaker: We have more time for questions and comments. The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'd like to comment on a couple of things that have been said, but first I should say

that it really is heartwarming how much support we have in this House for the protection of our kids.

I'd like to just reinforce a couple of points that I made in my remarks a couple of days ago. This is with regard to more flexible adoptions:

"Under our proposed new system, the children's aid society will have options to place that child with a suitable"—I emphasize "suitable"—"member of their extended family...."

"The adoption process includes an assessment of a parent's strengths and needs, as well as criminal reference checks...."

"The process must always start with a rigorous safety and risk assessment for all children.... Through Bill 210 and the regulations that will follow, we will strengthen the client complaint mechanism to provide a higher standard of accountability. I would also like to point out that even as Bill 210 is moving through the legislative process, I have asked my ministry to immediately develop a regulation to address situations where a child may be placed with extended family or a community member. The completion of an appropriate assessment, including background checks, is a critical safeguard in such situations."

I'd also like to make it known to everyone that we have, in fact, removed the age restriction on the autism file. That restriction does not exist, so please make sure that your constituents, those who have come to your door, and your family and friends know that age restriction does not exist.

Mr. Chudleigh: I would comment on the minister's comments that she's pleased to see all the support in the House. Let me remind the minister that this is second reading of this bill, the reading in principle, and I think everybody in the House would agree with the principles of this bill. However, we do have some serious concerns about the lack of detail of the overall plan and how it may protect the vulnerable children in Ontario to provide them with a better life. We would hope to see in the hearings that some of these details will become apparent and that we will have a warmer feeling toward how the bill will actually operate. That will give us the ability to support this bill at third reading as well, when it is read into the record and becomes the law of this land. That's the way this system works. Support on second reading doesn't necessarily mean that that will carry over into the next area.

We do have those concerns. There are a tremendous number of children who are currently under the care of a children's aid society, and it would be necessary for those children to be protected. That protection system, of course, should be—we all hope would be—much, much better than the protection system that these children enjoy today. All too many of them fall through the cracks, not only as Jeffrey did but in less severe ways as well, equally imprinting on their young lives, so that when they grow up, they have those scars. Hopefully, the regulations of this bill, when they are put out, will answer many of those questions.

Mr. Prue: I listened intently again to my colleague from Toronto—Danforth and what she had to say. She spoke passionately and well. She praised the government. You won't always hear that in this Legislature, but we in the New Democratic Party think that this legislation is long overdue. It's good legislation. It certainly is being supported by the children's aid societies.

The whole issue of crown ward adoption is one that must be visited, and visited very quickly. If I get a chance to speak to this, I will be elaborating on this, but I did serve for many years on the Children's Aid Society of Toronto when I was the mayor of East York and later as a mega-city councillor. I see Mr. Bruce Rivers here watching everything that I'm saying. He is a great man and it was a great organization, and I know that what is being recommended here is the right thing.

Having said that, I listened to my colleague and I also listened to the minister and it troubles me—and I'm sorry to digress, but she did talk about the autism file. She said children after the age of six are going to be able to continue in the service, and I welcome that, but at what cost? The cost, it appears, is that children who are under the age of six may never get the treatment. That is, I think, the hard dilemma we are seeing in a government that promised to end the age discrimination and also promised to put in additional resources.

There are people in my riding who quite literally have children who have not, up to the age of five, seen any government service whatsoever. They're having to do fundraising, they're having to go to friends and neighbours, they're having to put their homes under mortgage, and it simply is not right. Granted, something is being done or may potentially be done for those over six, but we need to help each and every autistic child.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge): I'm pleased to provide just a couple of minutes of comments with respect to Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act. I'm interested in the aspects that relate to the acknowledgement of the role that relatives, and particularly grandparents, can play with family members who need protection or support.

It probably wasn't all that many years ago, in relative terms, that grandparents and extended family were the primary resource available for children who found themselves in need, as a result of parents not being available or, in many cases, young parents who weren't in a position to take care of children. I know in my own particular extended family and more lengthy family history, grandparents and great-grandparents took on the obligation to provide a nurturing and supportive extended family environment for cousins as a result of the marital situations in those families. It's a history that I've had the opportunity to carry with me over a long period of time and watch those children grow to adults and raise their own families.

The capacity to encourage, support and provide windows of opportunity, for grandparents in particular or extended family members, to engage effectively in the care of young people in our community so that it's not

strangers, in essence, who are providing the primary care at the beginning is a very important part of what we should be trying to achieve. This legislation, in part, helps to achieve that. It's certainly not the only thing incorporated into this particular piece of legislation, but I think it's a critically important part. You need only ask any grandparent in Ontario, for the most part, about their feelings for their grandchildren and their willingness to provide support on an as-required or as-desired basis.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for the oral response.

Ms. Churley: I do want to thank the minister and the members for Halton, Beaches–East York and Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for their comments. I think all the comments were certainly pertinent to this bill. I was glad to hear what the minister had to say about some changes made. There's some focus on a need for further help for children with autism. That keeps coming up time and time again, for good reason, because a promise was made by the government and that was a promise broken.

As the minister brought up and as the member for Beaches–East York said, because of the court cases, children over the age of six can now get some support, but the issue is, will there be enough money to give the support needed to children under six. I think we would all agree that at the end of the day it's not just to the benefit of these children and their families, but it's to the benefit of society as a whole to help these children when they're really young, because the evidence is there that they grow up, in most cases, as stable members of society and can operate—again, not in all cases, but in most cases—in a normal fashion. That ultimately costs society less economically as well. That is something we will continue to talk about.

This is a second reading bill—quite true. We'll be watching to see that some of the amendments we've talked about and will be talking further about will be included and that the consultation happens. If that happens and the minister is really committed to having all-party support for this—that's where we all want to end up; no question about it—we will see this bill pass with flying colours in this House to the benefit of the children of this province.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke North.

I feel really privileged to speak in favour of this bill. This bill is about children. We often hear the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child." I think that is very true of all of us. We understand that we have a collective responsibility for taking care of our children. This bill is going to make sure that more crown wards and children who are in the care of children's aid are going to find permanence in their lives, and find a permanent home. It's going to create more flexibility for adoption. It's going to give us more options for that permanence. It's going to make the children's aid society more accountable and

sustainable, and it's going to remove some of the barriers we currently have for adoption.

One of the things that hasn't been spoken about very much, but is something that should be added to the conversation, is the fact that this bill allows foster parents to become legal guardians, which gives them legal and permanent custody of children they have charge over. We all know that many families get very attached to their foster children. I know that in my own constituency I have many families who are foster parents who take on that special role. It takes a special person to do that kind of work; that's not easy. Most of these children come with problems and issues, and these families help them to work through that so they become productive members of society. It's very important that we do that.

We want to make sure that the legislation and the processes we have take into account the viewpoints of the children. We don't want to penalize these children because of things that have happened that are beyond their control. We want to make sure these children have every opportunity to be happy, so we need to make sure that all reforms we propose take those things into consideration.

When a child is taken from their family, be it a bad family or not, they are very vulnerable. This is a very high-risk time for these children. They are probably more at risk than ever before because they feel isolated. Even though the move is in their better interests, we know these children cling to their parents because that is the life and the people they know, regardless of what's happened in their situation. We want to make sure these children are protected and safe.

We talk about the issue of reporting. We know that people are legally required to report abuse. We talked about that earlier in this debate. But we also know that a lot of people are very reluctant to do that. People feel they should mind their own business. We still have that in our society. People still continue to ignore what goes on behind closed doors. People are worried about being wrong when they make an accusation. They're worried about having children mistakenly taken out of a situation. Sometimes the person who is the most aware of these situations is a member of the extended family, and they are particularly reluctant to take the children out of the situation because they know that, in doing that, they may lose contact with those children. So sometimes they try to keep the children in the family, try to influence them because of the fear of that loss. This bill will make sure that family does not lose that contact, that they are able to actually be permanent parts of that child's life and be able to remove them from that situation.

As a grandparent, and I've talked to other grandparents, this is a great fear because many grandparents want to keep their grandchildren with them. Sometimes it happens that your child is not the best parent or they've married into a situation or are in a partnership that isn't a good partnership. The grandparents are afraid they will lose those grandchildren if they do anything to report what's going on, so they cling, in a desperate effort to keep their grandchildren near them, and they try to

influence what's going on in the family. But that doesn't always work.

One of the things in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and that I've heard about many times is the aboriginal situation. I have many First Nations bands in my riding. I've had many conversations with the chiefs and the band council members about the placement of aboriginal children in non-aboriginal foster homes. This bill addresses that situation. Our First Nations people are very concerned about children being moved away from their communities, away from their culture, away from their traditions and away from the family members who are around them. We need to build the capacity within our First Nations bands and communities that will allow those children to continue to stay in those communities, even when they've been removed from their home situations. First Nations bands want more ownership over providing for the safety and protection of aboriginal children.

The minister talked yesterday about some of the facts we see in this situation. Currently, as the minister reported, we have 9,000 children in permanent care of children's aid who are crown wards. On average, these children move every 22 months. That means they don't even stay two years in a situation. When they move, these children have to make new friends again, they very often change schools, they have new rules and new expectations, and all that instability affects their self-esteem and confidence. It also has a really negative effect on their ability to develop long-term relationships with people. I think most of us would recognize that and understand that when you move from family to family, after a while you become afraid to make attachments. You don't want to make attachments because you're afraid you will lose them, too, so you start to distance yourself in these situations. These children, as they grow into adulthood, carry that with them and have difficulty making long-term connections and relationships in adult life as well.

Currently, a child must sever all family connections before they can be adopted. This means that parents who know that what they are providing for their children isn't the best may still be reluctant to give that child up for adoption, even though they know adoption would be best for their child. They love their children, but in many cases there are situations where they sometimes simply cannot provide for their children, and they know that as well. But if giving their child up for adoption means they lose complete contact with that child, they don't want to do it. Under this bill, we will be able to allow children to be adopted into a permanent situation and still have contact with their families. That is a very important thing for these children.

Not all children, as was pointed out by the member for Toronto-Danforth, should necessarily go to family members. We all understand that, in the situation she spoke about, that was the wrong thing to happen to young Jeffrey. I certainly share the horror with her. When we hear these stories, I don't think any of us ever get over that kind of thing, ever become totally jaded or desensitized to what happens to children in those situations. We

want to make sure that children go into a family situation that is safe and protects them.

1720

But I also feel that children should be able to go and be adopted into their extended family. Their extended family brings with them the culture that they grew up in, and there are many. We are a very diversified country, a very diversified province. There are many people who have cultures that they want to share with their children, and those children have a right to learn and understand and be a part of that. So allowing children to be adopted within extended families means that they will be able to keep those things for themselves, and it's very important for those children to be able to keep their family ties and their ties to their community.

I feel that this is a very good bill. We want to make sure that these children are protected, and I think this bill goes a lot further than we had in the past in making sure that children have the kind of home situation that will build for them a kind of society that they will be proud to be a part of.

I will give this over to the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): It's a privilege, first of all, to follow my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex on this particular bill, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act.

With your indulgence, if I might, before beginning on this particular topic, I'd like to send a tele-hello to my own children, who are watching right now: Shamsa, aged six, and little Shafiq, aged four. Of course, I love you, and hopefully I'm going to be holding you in my arms very soon.

It's that same kind of love and effort, of nurturing and hopefully being there for them in all their times of need, that same spirit, that I think we in this government are embodying in this particular bill.

I'd like, again with your permission, to quote from one of the great child advocates in recent memory: a lawyer trained at Yale, a former First Lady, and now a senator in New York. I refer, of course, to Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, who wrote in her book *Living History*: "When I returned to Yale for my second year in the fall of 1970, I decided to concentrate on how the law affected children. Historically, children's rights and needs were covered in family law," and usually defined by whatever their parents or the society demanded.

She goes on to talk about how she learned more about child development through a course of study at the Yale Child Study Center. She even co-authored a book called *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*—a book that was authored, by the way, in co-operation with Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter. She writes: "I also began consulting with the medical staff at Yale-New Haven Hospital about"—and this is the point to acknowledge—"the newly acknowledged problem of child abuse," just entering the consciousness of the nation. That was only 1970.

She talks as well, for example, about a case that she had published under "Children Under the Law" in the Harvard Educational Review of difficulties that we in Ontario are experiencing even to this day, and that is some of the problems that individuals who would like to adopt children who are in the care of children's aid societies come up against. That's why we're moving in this government, as part of this bill, to simplify the adoption process.

Par exemple, pour simplifier l'adoption pour les parents: à l'heure actuelle, les parents qui veulent adopter un enfant provenant de l'une des sociétés d'aide à l'enfance de l'Ontario font souvent face à de longues listes d'attente et à des modalités de demande qui ne sont pas uniformes. Ces dernières comportent une évaluation professionnelle des points forts et des besoins du père ou de la mère. Le gouvernement modifie les modalités de demande pour que les parents potentiels n'aient pas à subir des réévaluations successives, et afin que ces modalités soient uniformes, tant pour les adoptions d'enfants pris en charge par le gouvernement que pour les adoptions privées partout en Ontario. Pour donner aux familles qui adoptent un enfant par l'intermédiaire d'une société d'aide à l'enfance le soutien dont elles ont besoin, les sociétés seront en mesure d'aider davantage des familles dans le besoin grâce à des programmes et des services.

Part of what this bill is exemplifying is the underlying philosophy of trying to expedite not only the children's aid society in the noble work that they do, but also to change some of the red tape of the legal framework aspects, whether it's what I've just referred to, the flexible adoptions leading to things like in-family adoptions, as well as changing some of the legal framework that is out there. This is part of the vision that the government of Ontario has for children and youth: health, hope and opportunity, hoping to ensure that our children and youth reach their full potential.

As has been mentioned, as we speak, more than 9,000 children are crown awards, essentially the responsibility of the province. These individuals deserve our expedited care, attention and initiative, that they may find permanent homes in which they may thrive, be permanently nurtured and receive the mutual support of not only the government but their environment and, of course, families.

Part of this is, as I've mentioned, referring to the adoption bottlenecks; unfortunately, they exist. For example, since 1994 there has been a 185% increase in the number of investigations conducted by children's aid societies. Unfortunately, as is quite evident even in the press today, still to this day there are a number of individuals, unfortunate children, who are exposed to both child abuse and neglect, be it physical, verbal, mental or sexual. This is why it is time for us in Ontario to move forward.

I can tell you that in my capacity as a physician before coming to this chamber, I would from time to time come across individuals and families where for various reasons—whether the caregivers themselves were physically

or mentally challenged, or there might have been even a cultural misunderstanding, in that certain forms of discipline which perhaps would have been more acceptable or current in the "old country" don't really wash once you're in Ontario. Whatever the particular scenario, I as a family doctor would still come across cases from the children's aid society.

Without naming names and without even really citing an age, I remember one young individual, a little girl, who initially came to my attention because she really wasn't receiving appropriate medical care. Family members would have to intervene; neighbours would have to intervene; eventually the children's aid society was called. This child was removed from the custody of her own parents and, unfortunately, like so many other children who come to the attention the children's aid society, essentially was shuffled from one home to another, to a group setting, to an individual setting and back and forth.

Meanwhile, part of the reason the government of Ontario, under the McGuinty vision, set up the entire new Ministry of Children and Youth Services is that we know very well that these formative years, basically zero to 10, have lifelong effects, whether it's on mere physical development and intellectual development or self-confidence and self-esteem. It was at precisely this time that the particular young adolescent suffered the most in all those categories just mentioned: self-confidence, self-esteem, physical, intellectual and emotional maturation. It's why we in this government need to take examples such as this, examples of individual cases, and broaden our initiatives, whether it's through the various legal manipulations—because one must always appease the legal gods—whether it's implementing philosophy on a widespread scale of flexible adoptions, helping the children's aid societies to do their noble work, empowering them financially and resourcing them fully. There are, as you'll appreciate, something like 52 children's aid societies doing very noble work across Ontario.

1730

Ultimately, what is the government after? It's after a thriving, nurturing and, if possible, permanent mutually supportive environment, not only for the children, but for society at large. Because only in that capacity, only in that method, only in that accessing of all these various points, will we as a government really be able to fulfill our duties to the children of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Time for questions and comments.

Mr. Chudleigh: One of the things that concerns us, of course, is how these processes are going to work. You hear the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex talking about parents who can't provide for their children. Of course, there's limited time for debate, and I know you didn't have as much time as you wanted. I'm wondering, if you can't provide for your children, what you do mean by "provide"? Is providing making sure they have the latest video games or the latest-fashion clothing? In my experience, the things that parents have to provide to

their children are love and self-worth, and those two things come free.

If you are considering taking a child from a parent and allowing them to be adopted under some system that allows that parent contact, but involves other people in that family relationship, I think you have to do so with a great deal of caution. Of course, the most important thing is the child and their development. But the other person is the birth mother, and I think you have to be very careful how you handle that birth mother, somebody who is perhaps already under stress, perhaps already in crisis. This process could destroy her completely. I think that has to be very carefully considered.

Those are some of the things that we don't see in this bill, as to how those things are going to be handled. It's fine to say, "It's going to be handled by professionals in the children's aid society," but there are untold numbers of stories about the children's aid society and how they've messed up in serious cases. I don't think that we'd want to expand on those number of cases.

Mr. Prue: I listened intently to the members for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and Etobicoke North, and I think what they had to say was particularly poignant and relevant to the debate here today. I commend them both.

The member for Etobicoke North talked about this being a very complex issue and the need to get it all right. I just want to expand on that, because he is right. We have to take, on occasion, a child from an abusive situation, whether that abusive situation is a parent who is drug- or alcohol-dependent, or sexually or physically abusive to the child. It is found out and society, the government and the agency have to move in to protect the child. That's what it's all about. Now, I don't think that anyone does that lightly. I don't think that anyone does that without considering the ramifications to the child, especially because even when you are taking a child from an abusive situation, it is still traumatic for the child. You are still taking him or her from the only parent they know, from the only lifestyle they know, from the home they know, from the friends they have at school, from the school they may be attending. You are literally yanking them away from what they know and putting them in uncertainty. We have to make sure that we do it right.

As I said earlier in my comments, I was on the Children's Aid Society of Toronto for a number of years and saw a number of very, very sad cases. But I also saw people who were dedicated and who worked; I saw a society that, if anything, needed more money. I saw people who were just trying their very best. I met foster parents who did the very best they could in the circumstance. We need to make sure that we get this right, that we deal not only with the crown wardship but all the other aspects so that any child who is taken from his or her parent or parents is well treated and is treated the best we can.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): It's a pleasure to stand as a parent and rise to this bill and to this situation. I must first of all compliment the fine, fine

speeches from the members for Etobicoke North and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

For all of us, it is a come-down to think that we have to institutionalize what the member for Etobicoke North calls so beautifully the environment we want for our children: a thriving, nurturing, permanent environment. To think that we, as parents, would fail and have to institutionalize that is a tough adjustment, and it's a philosophical adjustment in the classical sense of personal rights versus government rights and how we best build a society. It is the humility of mankind that we have to admit, as people, we fail and institutions collectively can come together and perhaps do it better than we can as individuals. It's not an easy thing for any of us to come to that conclusion, especially those who love their children as much as, obviously, members of this House do. But the excellence of us building a society is in the excellence of the way we come together to improve upon what we can't do as individuals. That, to me, is the essence of government. It's the essence of good government and it's the essence of what this bill is about.

I wish there was no need for this bill, but there is a huge need for this bill, when you see children starved to death on the front pages of our newspapers. We need protection for children because there are bad parents and there are people who don't conceive of a concept of bad parenting and don't think of it the way many of us take for granted.

I came from a very nurturing family, so for me it is hard to admit that we cannot do this other than as a collective.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I rise today to make comment on Bill 210 and on the comments from the members for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and Etobicoke North. I think we're all in agreement in the Legislature that to protect children is the most important thing.

The bill's aim is to increase the protection of children and to—I guess there are 9,000 children in permanent care of the children's aid society, which is very high. I have been very shocked, when I've met with the CAS in my riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, to hear the stories and to hear their recommendations of things we can do to improve the laws.

The legislation here is good, we're supportive of it, but we don't have all the details, as mentioned before by my colleague. With children's aid societies carrying \$70 million in deficits, their boards are cash-flowing to keep their employees salaried and in place for child protection in our province. The bill doesn't address that. We're hopeful that in regulations some more money will be put in, but the devil is in the details, and the need to protect children is utmost. With these changes is the framework—and hopefully with the children's aid's support that they're giving us—and the guidance, and they will give the government further guidance on the exact details that need to be implemented.

The legislation also proposes more extensive use of mediation instead of courts in child protection matters.

So I think that for children's services we need to evolve. There are a lot of alternatives out there today, and I'm happy to see that the government is listening to the children's aid society, bringing this bill forward. I think we can be innovative, and we need to be, because we need to protect our children. There are a lot of good groups in our communities, so I think that if we can work and hopefully have regulations that are going to help the children's aid society with this, we'll all be better communities for it.

1740

The Acting Speaker: It's time for oral response.

Mrs. Van Bommel: I want to thank, first of all, the member for Etobicoke North for sharing his time with me, and the members for Halton, Beaches—East York, Mississauga South and Haliburton—Victoria—Brock for their comments.

I want to go back to the member for Halton and his comments about what we are trying to do for our children. I absolutely agree that, as parents, the best thing we can do for our children, and as grandparents, the best thing we can do for our grandchildren, is provide love. That is the thing children look for the most and why they have such difficulty leaving even a bad situation, because they, in turn, still love their parents and grandparents.

We say, "What happens to people and why do they do this?" I'm thinking of one particular situation where a mother had mental health problems. She suffered from severe depression and was violent during those stages, so to help her children, she would lock them in a closet to protect them. That was her way of protecting her children. She finally came to the realization that she needed to let her children go, because she couldn't protect them the way she needed to. That's what she had to do. So she gave the care of her children over to children's aid. I think she did the right thing, but she wanted to keep that contact with her children.

In this situation, where we allow parents and extended family to keep in contact with their children yet still give them permission to let their children be adopted into loving families, I think is an important aspect of this bill. I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener—Waterloo): I'm certainly pleased to join the debate on Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

In listening to the presentations that have been made by my colleagues on all sides of this House, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that everybody is extremely committed in wanting to ensure that the children who live in Ontario are protected and have the opportunity to live in a secure environment, in a home with a loving family. If you take a look at this bill, the purpose of this bill is to do exactly that.

I was very surprised—and I've heard some of my other colleagues comment as well—that at the present time there are 9,000 children in the permanent care of

children's aid societies throughout Ontario. We know as well that today, a child who is under CAS care in a foster home must completely sever all their ties to their birth family before being eligible for adoption. That means as well that 70% of children in permanent care can't be adopted because their birth family has a court-ordered right to contact them. The good thing is, this new funding framework, which I certainly support, will put greater emphasis on making sure that children have the opportunity for adoption, while at the same time being able to maintain their current relationship with their family. I think that's good news.

I think we've heard it said a few times this afternoon already that children, when they are born into a family and raised by parents who sometimes are abusive or have alcohol or drug problems—no matter what happens, those children love those parents, and there is usually no place those children would rather be than with that mother and that father—the only mother and father they have ever known. However, as we know, it becomes imperative at times that when these situations arise, for the protection and safety of children, they are removed from the home by the children's aid society, or parents, as we just heard, voluntarily relinquish their children to the protection and custody of children's aid because they recognize that they are not able to provide the secure, safe environment for their children that they know is needed.

It's unfortunate that these types of situations arise in the first place. That was one of the reasons our government introduced the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children bill when we were in office. It was a bill that was intended, and continues to this day, to do an analysis—to screen, in other words—all newborns in Ontario. The reason you would do this is to determine if some children who are born in this province might be at risk. That risk might well be the fact that the parents—mother, father—might be known to be abusive. Perhaps there were drug or alcohol problems. Perhaps there were other problems within that home that would put that child at some risk. It was intended that that child would be screened if a risk was identified. There would be support from a nurse, to support that child and family. There would be layworkers who would work with those babies and mothers and fathers until they went to kindergarten. Of course, what you're trying to do there is to make sure that parents become better parents and that the family can continue to function as a family.

We need to recognize that today in this province there are people who become mothers or fathers who, because of their own situation, because of their own families, don't know how to parent. There are a lot of moms and dads who don't know how to parent. They had no role model themselves. It's not something you just pick up.

When we set up this Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, I can remember going to places where we were working with mothers in particular, teaching them that what they needed to do with these newborn babies was to rock them, sing to them and play with them. We take for

granted that everybody in Ontario would automatically know that, as a parent, that is what you do. You cuddle them, you hug them, you kiss them, you play with them, you read to them, you try to stimulate them. That's not the case. So that program was intended to help parents develop parenting skills. However, obviously not every child is identified to be at risk at birth. There are situations that require children to be put in the permanent care and custody of the children's aid society, and this bill is intended to deal with that.

I would agree with one colleague who today indicated that this bill is going to give foster parents the opportunity to adopt the children they have in their care. I have certainly seen many foster parents who devoted tremendous hours, months, years, to the lives of children, helping children who have been placed in their homes develop into well-rounded individuals who can go on and achieve success, whether it's academically or socially. I think it's tremendous that these people are now going to be given the opportunity to adopt these children with whom they have formed some very strong bonds of family. I think that's really important.

In fact, I think of one family in my community—my community being Waterloo region, where we have many foster parents who do an outstanding job in providing stimulating, safe, secure and loving homes for children. But I think of one family, and I don't know that the mother and father have had a break for a long time, because they accept into their home many children who are developmentally handicapped, who have severe problems. They are there night and day for those children. Sometimes the only break they get is when one of their older birth children returns to that home to provide a little bit of time for the parents, on occasion, to go out and see a movie or go to dinner.

1750

We're very fortunate in this province to have so many foster parents who are willing to support these children that go into the care of children's aid. If any of them are watching, and I know that all of my colleagues here would agree, I just want to say a sincere thank you to those dedicated individuals who do so much for those children.

We have a bill here that I believe is determined to do the right thing for children in this province who are in need of support. This bill also proposes more extensive use of mediation instead of the courts in child protection matters. They're going to use alternative dispute resolution methods before and during court proceedings.

When I take a look at this bill, on the surface I would support it. The only thing that I have some questions about is that all the detail is not here in this bill. I think this is an issue of such significance and such importance that it is extremely important that this bill go out for public consultation. We need to hear from people who have had first-hand experience. It may well be families, it may be people who are social workers or it may be people who have been involved in courts, but it's extremely important that this bill go out for very extensive consul-

tation because, obviously, if we don't get this bill right, it is going to have an impact on the children we are here to protect. We need to do what we can.

This bill is going to ensure that the adoption process is going to be accelerated, and that's important. I've been a secondary school teacher, and I've run into children who have gone from foster home to foster home and back to their birth family. These children have absolutely no roots, and they do look for roots. It's important that we provide that type of support for those children, that they have an opportunity to live in a loving home, to have roots but, if desired, they could continue to have a relationship with their birth family as well. This is what people are requesting.

There was an article in the paper, and I don't know if I can find it right now, but it was about a child who had been placed in a permanent home after moving from home to home. The difference it made to his life to finally know that he had a mother and father, and that he had his own room, his own friends and his own neighbourhood: He was able to interact with the brothers and the sisters that he now had, and there wasn't the fear that, at some point in time, he was going to be removed from that home and placed into perhaps another foster home or be returned to his birth mother, in this instance, who, despite her best efforts and desire to provide for her child, simply was not in a position to do so.

I met another young woman who stayed her whole life in the permanent care of child and family services, and she went on to get a university degree. Again, these children succeed despite many of the problems they have.

I want to just mention briefly that there has been a lot of progress made over the last number of years in trying to help children. We know that there are children who are abused. When our government was in office, we considered what had happened and we made some very significant changes to legislation, to the Child and Family Services Act, before this bill. I don't know if you remember, but we introduced an act, and the changes to the Child and Family Services Act were proclaimed on March 31, 2000.

The changes we introduced at that time really were no different from what we are trying to do right now. We are trying to promote the best interests, the protection and the well-being of children. In that instance, our changes expanded the reasons for finding a child in need of protection. For instance, the word "neglect" was specifically included and the threshold for risk of physical and emotional harm to children was lowered. That has resulted, in the years since 2000, in earlier action being taken to protect some of the children who were at risk.

These changes also allowed evidence of a parent's past conduct toward children to be used in child protection court proceedings. That is extremely important, that you be aware of what has happened in the case of how the parents have behaved with the children in the past.

Our changes at that time also clarified the duty of professions and the public to report that a child is or may

be in need of protection. That has encouraged more reporting of suspected abuse and neglect. I think that was one change that was extremely well supported, and we have certainly seen that it has been in the favour of children.

Our changes also made it easier for children's aid societies to get the information they need if they are going to protect our children. Our changes promoted earlier and more decisive planning for children's futures, so that permanent arrangements for children could be achieved as soon as possible, and that's what this bill today is trying to do as well.

It also ensured that access by relatives or other individuals to children who have been made crown wards is granted only if it is beneficial to the child, and provided for a mandatory review of the Child and Family Services Act at least every five years.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in his office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 183, An Act respecting the disclosure of information and records to adopted persons and birth parents / Projet de loi 183, Loi traitant de la divulgation de renseignements et de dossiers aux personnes adoptées et à leurs pères ou mères de sang.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, November 14, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman
 Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown
 Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
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	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

ROYAL ASSENT

The Lieutenant Governor	766
-------------------------------	-----

OTHER BUSINESS

Visitors

The Speaker.....	730, 738
------------------	----------

Speaker's ruling

The Speaker.....	730
------------------	-----

Legislative pages

The Speaker.....	731
------------------	-----

Remembrance Day

Mr. Phillips.....	736
-------------------	-----

Mr. Tory	736
----------------	-----

Mr. Hampton.....	737
------------------	-----

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Jeudi 3 novembre 2005

AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉS

Loi de 2005 modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé (test PSA pour le dépistage du cancer de la prostate), projet de loi 4, <i>M. Mauro</i>	
Adoptée	727
Loi de 2005 sur les extincteurs automatiques domiciliaires, projet de loi 2, <i>Mme Jeffrey</i>	
Adoptée	727

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2005 préservant la propriété familiale de Frederick Banting, projet de loi 20, <i>M. Wilson</i>	
Adoptée	731
Loi de 2005 sur la responsabilité en matière de conservation de l'énergie, projet de loi 21, <i>Mme Cansfield</i>	
Adoptée	731

Loi de 2005 modifiant la Loi sur les services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle, projet de loi 22, <i>M. Dunlop</i>	
Adoptée.....	731

Loi de 2005 sur la fête du patrimoine hellénique, projet de loi 23, <i>M. Duguid</i>	
Adoptée.....	732

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2005 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne les services à l'enfance et à la famille, projet de loi 210, <i>Mme Bountrogianni</i>	
M. Qaadri.....	762
Débat présumé ajourné.....	766

SANCTION ROYALE

Le lieutenant-gouverneur	766
--------------------------------	-----

CONTENTS

Thursday 3 November 2005

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS		
Health Insurance Amendment Act (PSA Tests for Prostate Cancer), 2005, Bill 4, Mr. Mauro		
Mr. Mauro.....	709, 717	
Mr. Baird	710	
Mr. Bisson	711	
Mr. Craitor	714	
Mr. Klees	714	
Mr. McNeely	715	
Mr. Dunlop	716	
Mr. Hoy	716	
Ms. Scott.....	717	
Agreed to	727	
Home Fire Sprinkler Act, 2005, Bill 2, Mrs. Jeffrey		
Mrs. Jeffrey.....	718, 726	
Mr. Hardeman.....	719	
Mr. Duguid	721	
Ms. Scott.....	721	
Mr. Prue	722	
Mr. Craitor.....	724	
Mr. Ouellette.....	724	
Mr. Flynn	725	
Mr. Parsons.....	725	
Agreed to	727	
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS		
Veterans		
Mr. Dunlop	728	
Energy conservation		
Mr. McNeely	728	
Mrs. Sandals	728	
Mr. Levac.....	729	
Ms. Wynne.....	729	
By-election in Scarborough-Rouge River		
Mr. Klees	728	
RideShare		
Ms. Martel	729	
Immigrant services		
Ms. Mossop	730	
Environmental protection		
Ms. Scott.....	730	
FIRST READINGS		
Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act, 2005, Bill 20, Mr. Wilson		
Agreed to	731	
Mr. Wilson.....	731	
Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, 2005, Bill 21, Mrs. Cansfield		
Agreed to	731	
Developmental Services Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 22, Mr. Dunlop		
Agreed to	731	
Mr. Dunlop.....	731	
Celebration of Hellenic Heritage Act, 2005, Bill 23, Mr. Duguid		
Agreed to	732	
Mr. Duguid.....	732	
MOTIONS		
Private members' public business		
Mr. Caplan	732	
Agreed to	732	
STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES		
Energy conservation		
Mrs. Cansfield.....	732	
Mr. Yakabuski.....	734	
Mr. Hampton	735	
Crime Prevention Week		
Mr. Kwinter.....	733	
Mr. Dunlop.....	734	
Mr. Kormos	736	
ORAL QUESTIONS		
Water quality		
Mr. Tory	738	
Mr. Ramsay	738, 740	
Mr. Hampton.....	740	
Employment		
Mr. Tory	739	
Mr. Duncan	739	
Energy conservation		
Mr. Hampton	741	
Mrs. Cansfield.....	741, 742	
Mr. Yakabuski.....	742	
Mr. Rinaldi	745	
Mrs. Dombrowsky.....	745	
Special education		
Mr. Hampton	742	
Mr. Kennedy	742	
Immigrant services		
Mr. Duguid.....	743	
Mr. Colle	743	
Earlton/Timiskaming Regional Airport		
Mr. Miller.....	743	
Mr. Bartolucci	744	
Pathologist		
Mr. Hampton	744	
Mr. Bryant	744	
Leslie M. Frost Centre		
Ms. Scott	745	
Mr. Caplan	745	
Services for the developmentally disabled		
Mr. Prue	746	
Ms. Pupatello	746	
Smart meters		
Mrs. Van Bommel	747	
Mrs. Cansfield	747	
Mr. Racco	747	
Mortgage brokers		
Mr. Tascona	747	
Mr. Duncan	748	
PETITIONS		
Public accounting standards		
Mr. Tascona	748	
Construction workers		
Mr. Berardinetti	748	
Services for the developmentally disabled		
Mr. Ouellette	748	
Mr. Hardeman	748	
Mr. Klees	750	
Macular degeneration		
Mr. Craitor	748	
Mr. Delaney	751	
Immigrants' skills		
Mr. Delaney	749	
Mr. Craitor	750	
Mr. Kular	750	
Leslie M. Frost Centre		
Ms. Scott	749	
Mandatory retirement		
Mr. Berardinetti	749	
Health care services		
Mr. Ouellette	750	
SECOND READINGS		
Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 210, Mrs. Bountrogianni		
Mr. Delaney	751	
Mr. Klees	751, 752, 756	
Ms. Churley	752, 754, 756, 760	
Mr. Chudleigh.....	752, 755, 759, 762	
Mr. Levac	752	
Mr. Racco	755	
Mr. Prue	755, 759, 763	
Mrs. Chambers	758	
Mr. Arthurs	759	
Mrs. Van Bommel	760, 764	
Mr. Qaadri	761	
Mr. Peterson	763	
Ms. Scott	763	
Mrs. Witmer	764	
Debate deemed adjourned.....	766	

Continued overleaf



No. 16A

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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Monday 14 November 2005

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Lundi 14 novembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 14 November 2005

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BULLYING AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): This week is designated as Bullying Awareness Week across Ontario. For the past two years, parents and advocacy groups have been asking this Minister of Education to assume his responsibilities by ensuring that every student in this province knows that their hotline for protection from intimidation and bullying is their principal or the nearest teacher in their school.

Teacher training needs to include practical methods for detecting and dealing with bullying. Principals need to know that they will be held accountable for what is going on in their schools.

Student-to-student bullying is the face of this issue. However, we need to be aware that teachers, education workers and parents are also victims of bullying. The problem is significant and it isn't going away.

The excellent work being done by the 200-member London Anti-Bullying Coalition was the subject of a newsmagazine by TVO's Studio 2 entitled Battling Bullies. It has been nominated for a Gemini Award, in the best news magazine segment, to be awarded later this week. It profiled the devastating consequences of bullying, the role of the Internet, which is the latest method of bullying, as well as examining the behaviour of bullies.

We owe a thank you to the London Anti-Bullying Coalition for their determination in bringing this issue forward. They are part of a growing network of parents and educators who want real solutions to this very real and dangerous problem that plagues our schools and our communities, and threatens the right of every student to a safe and supportive environment.

AGRICULTURAL AWARDS

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): Last Wednesday, I attended the annual rural-urban dinner hosted by the Chatham and District Chamber of Commerce. I was honoured to have the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of five exceptional individuals.

Dennis Jack was the recipient of the Agriculturalist of the Year Award. He has served and belongs to numerous

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 14 novembre 2005

agricultural organizations. Dennis is chair of the Ridgeway College Agri-Food Foundation, which is responsible for the fundraising efforts for the Rudy H. Brown Rural Development Centre. I am proud that the McGuinty government has made a \$3.5-million commitment to this worthwhile project.

Dave and Brenda Baute received the Agriculture Innovator of the Year Award. They operate Maizex Seeds and have introduced several innovations to hybrid corn seed production. They market over 60 grain and silage corn hybrids across all growing regions in Canada and the northeastern United States.

Kelly Snobelen is the female 4-H Member of the Year. Kelly received many awards, both in competitive and non-competitive clubs, and participated in 4-H association events and fundraisers. Mitchell Pool is the top 4-H male. He has competed in 4-H competitions locally, regionally in London and internationally at the Royal Winter Fair. Both Kelly and Mitchell have exemplified the "Learn to do by doing" motto of the 4-H program.

Through their hard work and dedication, these five individuals have made tremendous contributions to the betterment of agriculture and the quality of life in our rural community.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Sir Frederick Banting was born on this day in 1891. In recognition of his contribution to humanity, today is also World Diabetes Day.

Canadians connect Sir Frederick Banting with the discovery of insulin. For this outstanding medical discovery, Banting was awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1923, Canada's first.

A noble man, he did not seek to profit from his achievement. Instead of applying for a patent, Banting transferred the rights for his life-saving serum to the University of Toronto for \$1. This magnanimous gesture ensured affordable insulin for millions of people suffering from the metabolic disorder known to us as diabetes. His contributions to medicine were so immense that CBC viewers and listeners selected him as one of our top 10 greatest Canadians.

At the Legislature this afternoon, I joined Bob Banting, a descendant of Sir Frederick Banting; his wife, Trudi; former New Tecumseth Mayor Larry Keogh; and Alex Wright to meet the Queen's Park press galley. Our message is to encourage all members of the Legislature

to support my private member's bill, the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act. The purpose of the bill is to preserve Sir Frederick's memory by safeguarding the buildings and property where he was born. The home and buildings on Sir Frederick's Alliston farm are deteriorating. I'm sad to say that the homestead is in ruins, largely because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society.

This significant piece of legislation will be voted on this Thursday during private members' business, and I encourage all members to support it.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Last week, I met with representatives of a number of Anglican parishes in my riding. They wanted to talk to me about the need for affordable housing. They visited me as part of a campaign organized by the Anglican church in Toronto. As part of this campaign, members of many parishes around Toronto and the surrounding area are visiting their MPPs to discuss housing issues in their ridings. Some of you may already have talked to them during constituency week.

Members of these congregations are concerned at the lack of truly affordable housing for the poorer members of our community, and they want to find ways of working together to bring about some action on the construction of new affordable and supportive housing units.

My advice to them is that they need to continue to put pressure on members of the governing party until the McGuinty government keeps its promises not just to build more affordable housing but to amend the Tenant Protection Act. The Tenant Protection Act is also an issue for my constituents. Just this morning I had a call from a lifelong Liberal in my riding who asked me to convey a message to Mr. McGuinty. The message was: Keep your promise to fix the Tenant Protection Act, or in the future she will be voting for the NDP.

McMASTER BASKETBALL V. BULLYING EVENT

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): On October 24, over 10,000 middle school students, 500 volunteers from McMaster University and Mohawk College, members of the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, Toronto Raptors, McMaster Marauders and McGill Redmen, and players from the Youtheatre Ottawa, alongside delegates from Vancouver, Saskatoon, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, and Rochester, New York, all gathered at Copps Coliseum in downtown Hamilton.

It was not a sporting event or a pep rally. It was not a concert or a convention. This formidable gathering of people was for the third annual McMaster Basketball v. Bullying event, an assembly of people from all walks of life who have one thing in common, and that is to reduce bullying.

Tracy Vaillancourt, an assistant professor at McMaster University, believes that bullying is becoming increasingly evident in schools. It has come to the point where even the teachers feel they are victims of bullying by their own students. Ms. Vaillancourt decided to be proactive and to address this trend by organizing the basketball v. bullying event to promote awareness and to encourage an attitude of sportsmanship that she hopes will carry on into every aspect of our lives. This wonderful event finished off with a university basketball game that demonstrated the type of sportsmanship Ms. Vaillancourt would like to promote.

I would like to extend my sincerest congratulations to Ms. Vaillancourt on this very successful rally in downtown Hamilton.

TORONTO POLICE SERVICE CONFERENCE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I was very pleased last Saturday to attend the ninth annual Toronto Police Service Community Police Liaison Committee conference, which was held here at Queen's Park. The theme of this year's conference was Community Engagement—Emergency Preparedness.

I was one of the sponsors of the event, and I was pleased and honoured to take part in the opening ceremonies with Minister Kwinter, Chief William Blair of the Toronto Police Service and Dr. Alok Mukherjee, chair of the Toronto Police Services Board.

1340

I'd like to take this time to thank Mr. James Sneep, staff inspector with the Toronto Police Service, for acting as MC; he did an excellent job during the day. I'd also like to thank the organizing committee: May Chow, chair of 52 division CPLC; Lorrie Ming-Sun, chair of 32 division CPLC; Adrian Richter, vice-chair of 53 division CPLC; Frank Sword, chair of 22 division CPLC; Jeff Paulin, chair of 55 division CPLC; and Staff Sergeant Steve Clarke, Constable Candace Paul and Sandra Farrell of volunteer resources with the Toronto Police Service.

In the end, what we tried to do in this particular conference was draw as many people together as possible to deal with emergency preparedness. I just want to thank all the people who took part in that particular conference. It was an excellent day. We need to know that we can count on our volunteer services within our province.

MEDEC

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): It's with great pleasure that I rise in the House today and offer words of welcome to representatives of MEDEC, the national industry association representing Canada's medical device and diagnostic companies.

Representatives from the association and 16 member companies are here today to promote innovations in medical device technologies, as well as the good work

this important sector does for communities right across Canada.

Through their strong and valued partnerships with health care professionals, patients, hospitals and governments across the country, MEDEC members are key drivers of innovation aimed at improving health outcomes and the quality of life for patients in Ontario and across the country.

Throughout today, MEDEC members will meet with MPPs and political and public service staff to learn more about government and legislative processes. They will also share their views on how patient access to innovative and safe medical device technologies can advance health care, and how the medical device industry can contribute to enhancements in quality and delivery of care and a robust economy.

MEDEC will be hosting a reception in the legislative dining room today from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., where political and public policy-makers will have further opportunities to speak directly with company representatives from across Ontario and take a look at just some of these important technologies. I'd encourage all members to attend.

I'd like to once again extend a warm welcome to MEDEC and their member companies represented here today and wish them a very successful day at the Ontario Legislature. I know many of the members are here in the gallery. Welcome.

ESTHER AND CHARLES MULLI

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It is not Mothers' Day, but today we do have the opportunity to recognize a guest in the assembly whose work as the "mother" of over 1,400 Kenyan street children is well worth celebrating.

Esther and Charles Mulli have used their private resources to build a series of orphanages in Kenya dedicated to rescuing and raising street kids. Many of these children are AIDS orphans or substance-dependent.

I had the opportunity to join them in Kenya this summer and witnessed first-hand the incredible results that these entrepreneurs-turned-foster-parents have been able to obtain in their orphanages.

The children raised in their homes graduate with top marks. They have embarked on some incredible sustainable agricultural projects that feed and provide business opportunities for the kids, and they are making tremendous strides in both health care and education for the children.

I think we can learn a lot from the Mullis and their orphanages in Kenya. Tonight, all members of the assembly will have a chance to meet and speak with Charles and Esther Mulli at a reception in committee rooms 228 and 230 at 5 p.m. I hope to see you there.

It's an honour today to introduce Ms. Esther Mulli, who is in the members' gallery. She is in Ontario to talk about her and her husband Charles's work in the Mulli Children's Family Orphanages in Kenya.

BY-ELECTION IN SCARBOROUGH-ROUGE RIVER

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I had the honour of serving on the former city of Scarborough council and on Toronto city council for nine years with one Bas Balkissoon, our Liberal candidate in the upcoming by-election in Scarborough-Rouge River.

I must say I'm very impressed by the strong support Bas and our campaign have been receiving at the doors. I know that Bas has both the talent and the integrity to serve Scarborough very well in this House. It's my understanding that these sentiments were shared until very recently by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, who contacted Bas earlier this fall, writing—and I suggest all members listen very carefully to this because they may get a kick out of it. The Leader of the Opposition wrote, "I wanted to drop you a note to tell you how enthusiastic I would be about discussing your possible candidacy for our party in the Alvin Curling seat just vacated." This is a direct quote. "I have always been impressed by your strong commitment to accountability in government and some of the great leadership you have shown in that area."

Wisely, Bas turned the Tories down and opted to run for a party that understands and cares about the needs of the constituents in his riding. The Tory caucus has resorted since then to petty digs at Bas's credibility in order to prop up what is fast becoming an increasingly desperate campaign. The man that the Tories were too quick to woo is now the target of the PC Party's unabashed and undeserved scorn.

For a politician who loves to wax eloquent about the importance of being straightforward and accountable to voters, John Tory has some accounting to do of his own for this duplicity.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2005 LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 24, An Act to regulate the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids / Projet de loi 24, Loi réglementant l'épandage et le stockage des boues d'épuration et des matières sèches biologiques.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm reintroducing this private member's bill for two fundamental reasons: first, to focus our attention on this important matter of protecting our environment; and second, to respect the

ongoing work being done by Deb Vice and members of the Protect the Ridges organization and a study that's ongoing in Durham in this region to resolve this matter.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES LIEUX DE SÉPULTURE DES ANCIENS PREMIERS MINISTRES

Mr. Brownell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 25, An Act to preserve the gravesites of former premiers of Ontario / Projet de loi 25, Loi visant à conserver les lieux de sépulture des anciens premiers ministres de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

The member may have a brief statement.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): This bill has seen two previous incarnations at the hands of the now Honourable Steve Peters. If passed, this bill would require the Minister of Culture to mark the gravesites of our former Premiers with, at minimum, an Ontario flag. It would be within the minister's power to recognize the gravesites of our former Premiers with further markers such as plaques or signs. When Minister Peters tabled his variants of this bill, it received support from all parties, who recognized the great importance of acknowledging the 18 Premiers who led this province. I hope this bill can again count on all-party support.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private member's public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr. Kular, Mr. Lalonde and Mr. Zimmer exchange places in the order of precedence such that Mr. Kular assumes ballot item 59, Mr. Lalonde assumes ballot item 15, and Mr. Zimmer assumes ballot item 12.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that the following amendment be made to the membership of a certain committee: Ms. Mossop replaces Mr. Brown on the standing committee on justice policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE Sittings

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, November 14, 2005, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1352 to 1357.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Rinaldi, Lou
Baird, John R.	Hoy, Pat	Runciman, Robert W.
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Sandals, Liz
Bradley, James J.	Kwinter, Monte	Smith, Monique
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smitherman, George
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Sterling, Norman W.
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Tascona, Joseph N.
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Tory, John
Craitor, Kim	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Munro, Julia	Wilson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dombrowsky, Leona	Parsons, Ernie	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Peters, Steve	Yakabuski, John
Faherty, Jim	Phillips, Gerry	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qaadri, Shafiq	
Fonseca, Peter	Ramal, Khalil	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Chudleigh, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Hardeman, Ernie	Martel, Shelley	
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 61; the nays are 10.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): This past Thursday I had the opportunity to make an announcement of which I'm extremely proud. More importantly, it was an announcement that will have a profound effect on the health of people and communities throughout Ontario. Allow me to share this good news with all members of the House.

Last week, our government announced the largest-ever expansion of our province's community health centre network. We are investing \$74.6 million over the next three years to enhance services at all existing community health centres and to create 22 new CHCs and 17 new satellite community health centres. That's a 60% increase.

As impressive as these numbers are, what's even more impressive is the breadth and distribution of these new CHCs and satellite community health centres. Once this expansion is complete, we will have 76 full CHCs and 27 satellite community health centres, and they will be located in every part of this great province.

Mr. Speaker, as you and many members of this House know, community health centres are a tremendously effective and important part of this government's efforts to reform primary health care. They offer an interdisciplinary approach to health care and healthy living through a team of health care professionals working together. They provide both front-line primary health care services as well as community health programs. They're community-focused and cost-effective, and they are particularly oriented toward those who face barriers such as poverty, homelessness or language barriers. In short, they're one of the most effective tools we have to address health issues. By "health issues" we don't just mean treating people when they're sick; we mean the entire range of factors that contribute to healthy lives and healthy communities.

Please allow me to quickly list the communities that will be receiving full community health centres over the next three years: Woodstock; Fort Erie-Port Colborne; Malvern, in Scarborough; Cornwall; Prescott-Russell; Sudbury East; Kapuskasing; Chatham-Kent; St. Thomas; St. Catharines; Bramalea; Belleville; Minden; Brock township; Markdale; Brantford; Niagara Falls; Vaughan; Port Hope; Collingwood; Midland; and Sturgeon Falls.

Those are just the full community health centres. As I said, we are also creating 17 new satellite community health centres. Satellite community health centres are smaller centres, just as important as full CHCs but tuned more specifically to the needs of their communities. Satellite community health centres are going into Shelldale, Smiths Falls, Nepean, Thunder Bay, Wallaceburg, Malton, Pickering, Napanee, Trenton; and here in

Toronto in Crescent Town; at Jane and Finch; in Jamestown in Rexdale; at Kipling and Dixon; at Mount Dennis in Weston; at the Peanut Plaza at Don Mills and Finch; at the Junction triangle in the west end; and in York Centre.

I can see members on all sides of the House struggling to contain their enthusiasm and applause. But the real winners are the people of Ontario. Once this expansion is complete, every community identified in the Strong Neighbourhoods report prepared by the city of Toronto and the United Way will be serviced by a community health centre or the satellite of a community health centre. We know that they're especially effective in urban areas because they do much more than provide health care. They offer programs to combat violence, they help young people with education and training, they offer support networks to isolated individuals and they help new Canadians with ESL. That is precisely why this government is investing in one new community health centre and eight new satellites for Toronto neighbourhoods.

This dramatic and historic expansion of community health centres is the right thing to do, and this is the right time to do it.

SECURITIES LEGISLATION

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I rise today to update members of the House on the progress made since the standing committee on finance and economic affairs tabled its report on the five-year review of the Securities Act just over a year ago.

The Securities Act provides for regular legislative review. A committee chaired by Mr. Purdy Crawford conducted the initial five-year review. That committee's report was tabled and referred to the finance committee, which reviewed the report and held hearings last year. Based on its findings, the legislative committee issued a unanimous report with 14 recommendations to the government a year ago.

We have completed many of the recommendations and have made significant headway on many others, from implementing civil liability in the secondary market to advancing the design of a common security regulator. We have proposed a number of changes in the Budget Measures Act, 2005 (No. 2), introduced by my colleague on November 2, that respond directly to the standing committee's recommendations.

Of particular interest to the members of the House, the bill proposes a new mechanism to strengthen the Legislative Assembly's oversight of the OSC by having its annual report referred to a legislative committee. Other amendments in my colleague's act would, if passed:

- give the OSC broader rule-making authority over corporate governance matters;

- allow the OSC to make rules to give shareholders more flexibility to communicate with each other during a takeover bid; and

- give the OSC authority to make rules to require an investment fund, such as a mutual fund, to establish an

independent governance body to oversee specified activities of the fund and the fund manager.

In addition to these amendments, I would like to outline some additional significant accomplishments to date. We are the first government in Canada to give secondary market investors a statutory right to sue public companies for misleading disclosure and failure to make timely disclosure. These new investor rights take effect December 31, 2005, just over a month from now. We have also amended the Securities Act so that the next review committee will begin their work in May 2007, and subsequent reviews will take place every four years. We've made consistent changes, as well, to the Commodity Futures Act. We've listened carefully to the legislative committee and, as recommended, we have not given the OSC basket rule-making authority, nor the power to make blanket rulings and orders.

As for other report recommendations, we have made significant progress on a number of important regulations. Considerable effort and I think steady progress is being made toward a common Canadian securities regulator. There have been significant developments in the last year: The work of the Crawford panel, a panel that we appointed, is well underway to design a more detailed proposal for a common regulator. We expect the panel's report shortly, within the next few weeks. In late September, for the first time ever, provincial, territorial and federal ministers responsible for securities regulations met to discuss a range of capital market issues and securities regulations. At that time, I apprised my colleagues of the work being done by the Crawford panel and offered to circulate a copy of the panel's report when it is available. Ministers have agreed to a follow-up meeting; the panel's report is one of the items we will discuss.

The legislative committee recommended separating the adjudicative function of the OSC from other functions if substantial progress within 12 months toward a single regulator is not made. We believe this issue is especially relevant to the structure of a common regulator. Steady progress has been made over the past 12 months toward establishing a single regulator. In the context of a goal that has been proposed since the 1960s, that progress is significant. We have asked the Crawford panel to look at the structure of the adjudicative function in the model they develop, and I look forward to their recommendations in the next few weeks. In the meantime, it's important to remember that the independent Fairness Committee headed by the Honourable Coulter A. Osborne found no evidence that the OSC hearings have been biased or unfair.

I would like to now talk about some of the legislative committee's other recommendations.

The 2005 budget announced that we will introduce updated securities transfer legislation later this year. We plan to do that very shortly. We are working toward establishing a task force to review the role of self-regulatory organizations, and we are exploring timely and affordable ways for wronged investors to seek restitution.

Finally, I would like to welcome Mr. David Wilson as our new chair of the Ontario Securities Commission,

effective November 1, 2005. We are looking forward to Mr. Wilson's contribution to ensuring Ontario's capital markets are strong and healthy, and have the confidence of investors and publicly traded companies alike. Mr. Wilson is an outstanding individual, and we are pleased that Mr. Wilson has agreed to lend his talent and expertise to this important role.

In closing, our government continues to work and ensure that our capital markets continue to be attractive to investors, that investors are well protected and that Ontario remains a great place to invest.

1410

DIABETES

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Today, November 14, has been designated by the International Diabetes Federation and the World Health Organization as World Diabetes Day, in an effort to promote global awareness of the complications of diabetes and to celebrate the lives of those who cope with the disease every day.

November 14 has been chosen because today is the birthday of Ontario's Sir Frederick Banting, the co-discoverer of insulin at the University of Toronto. As the honourable member for Simcoe-Grey pointed out, we have members of Sir Frederick's family, his descendants, with us in the gallery, and we very much welcome them to the Legislature.

Diabetes is a serious public health issue in Ontario, and one that is of great concern to this government. As this government works to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage by improving the health of our population, I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you some facts related to diabetes:

—In Ontario, approximately 800,000 people suffer from this potentially debilitating disease, and an estimated 200,000 may be completely unaware that they have diabetes;

—Diabetes accounts for one third of all heart attacks and strokes, 43% of heart failures, 51% of new dialysis patients and 70% of the amputations done in this province; and

—Diabetes and its complications cost Ontario's health care system \$1 billion annually.

The approach this government has adopted is that the best health care system seeks to prevent illness in the first place. That's the kind of system we're trying to build in Ontario, and what my Ministry of Health Promotion is all about.

As well as the services and assistance this government provides to diabetes patients, it's important to know that the McGuinty government is taking action to prevent the risk factors that lead to diabetes. My ministry is directly addressing the need to increase the level of physical activity in Ontario through our Active 2010 program and through our communities in action fund.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, under the leadership of my colleague George Smitherman, pro-

vides diabetes education and assistive devices programs to help those who have diabetes cope with their day-to-day challenges.

In co-operation with our aboriginal communities, we have developed diabetes initiatives that improve access to programs and services for our First Nations people.

As Minister of Health Promotion, and using World Diabetes Day as the format, I'd like to encourage all Ontarians to increase their awareness of this disease. I'd like to remind everyone of the potential that exists to prevent diabetes.

Just this morning, here in Toronto, I was pleased to join Sobeys and the Canadian Diabetes Association in launching a new Smart Options initiative that highlights healthy foods. Innovative partnerships like this one will help us make progress in avoiding this disease.

I also want to thank Michael Howlett, president of the Canadian Diabetes Association, all the men and women of the CDA and the thousands of volunteers who work tirelessly to raise funds and help diabetes patients and their families for the CDA's great work. I had the pleasure this past weekend, for instance, of kicking off one of the races for the cure in Ottawa and want to congratulate Melanie Estable-Porter and other volunteers for a wonderful event.

Our government places a priority on improving the health of the people of this province. They can take comfort in knowing that this government is taking steps to address diabetes in a concrete and meaningful way.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I am pleased to be able to respond to the statement in regard to community health centres today. I have always—as has our government—certainly supported health centres. I did find it very interesting that the minister made the announcement last week in the riding of Scarborough-Rouge River, which happens to be having a by-election this month. It was a rather political announcement, and I know there were a few people who questioned the location of the announcement and whether this was really about improvements for people. The other question that has been asked is about concern over the amount of money that is going to be provided for existing community health centres. There was no information whatsoever provided, and there's certainly concern.

The other concern is the timeline for funding. It's very unclear and very vague.

I think we also need to take into consideration the fact that this government often makes health care announcements, and a lot of it is hype and rhetoric. We all know about the family health team announcements which have been made. I think it's important to note that despite the fact that about 69 have been announced, about 50 of those were former family health networks which our government had set up, and only one family health team today is fully operational as a family health team. So this government makes lots of announcements, but we see

little action and little impact on changing health access for people in the province of Ontario. This government does a much better job of making sure that people are asked to pay more in the form of a \$2.4-billion health tax and yet get less, because today they don't have the same access to optometry or physiotherapy or chiropractic services. We also know this is a government that has fired 767 nurses. So as far as improved access to doctors, nurses and health care, that's not the case.

SECURITIES LEGISLATION

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton): I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Government Services. The minister says that they're doing everything they can to ensure that investors are well protected. But I would say to the minister, you're not doing enough, and your Attorney General is standing in the way of protecting investors in this province. He has been asked on more than one occasion to protect small investors and seniors from financial fraud, to increase the time limitation period from two years to six years, because the financial complaint system just doesn't work to allow small investors and seniors to put their claim forth in a period that would not be within the two-year period. He knows that we have to extend the period from two years to six years.

So I would ask the minister to try to convince the Attorney General, who in Bill 14, under schedule D, made sure that his Bay Street friends would get an increase. They have an agreement that they can extend the time limitation period so they're not subject to the Limitations Act. Convince your Attorney General, under schedule D of Bill 14, to ensure that small investors and seniors across this province can have fairness and investor protection by increasing the time limitation period from two years to six years, Minister.

DIABETES

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): In response to the minister, with regard to World Diabetes Day: Our fight to control and our fight to cure diabetes, of course, knows no political boundaries. All members of the House are interested in forwarding the agenda with regard to this terrible disease. We have had in this Legislature a private member's bill from a backbencher on the Liberal side, Bill 55, which died on the order paper, which allowed people to access additional care. Many of us in this Legislature voted for that bill and would like to support that bill for insulin pumps to be available to all those in need.

More importantly, we have a bill that we're going to debate this Thursday, Bill 20, the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act, put forward by Jim Wilson, the member for Simcoe-Grey, to preserve the birthplace of Dr. Banting. I urge all members to support that. I would look that we could pass second and third—and final—reading this Thursday, and celebrate this wonderful day for Mr. Banting's tremendous contributions.

SECURITIES LEGISLATION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): In response to the Minister of Government Services: The problem I have with the statement you have made today is that the separation of the adjudicative function was the cornerstone of the reform put forward by the all-party committee. A whole year later, virtually nothing has been done. The honourable Coulter Osborne argued persuasively against the current system, not, as your statement said today, in support of it. His statement was that justice not only must be done, but it must be seen to be done appropriately. It's clear that there is no movement. It is clear that given the glacial speed at which federal-provincial relations seem to be going, on everything from the labour market to immigration and now to this, that we can expect only more of the same. It is time for you to move this process along as speedily as possible to protect those investors in Ontario who are desperately in need of protection.

1420

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the statement made by the Minister of Health, the question is, how long have New Democrats been urging this government to fund CHCs? The answer is: For two long years since this government was elected, every time the minister got up and talked about primary care reform, I said in response, why doesn't the government move forward on this effective model of primary care? That's what our government did. We recognized that it was a good idea to have health care providers on salary, that it was a very good idea to have a full range of health care providers—doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, mental health workers, social workers—providing care to patients, that it was a good idea that the focus shouldn't just be on illness, prevention or treatment but on health promotion initiatives as well keeping people healthy longer, and that it was a very good idea to have local boards determine what the direction of those CHCs would be so that they could be responding to the health care needs in those communities. That's why our government funded 21 new CHCs and nine aboriginal health and wellness centres in the depths of a recession.

The real question is, why did it take the government so long to deal with the some 80 applications for CHCs that were at the ministry the day the Liberals arrived as the government? Over the past two years, because the government hasn't responded, many communities have lost opportunities for primary health care because this government didn't move on this effective model.

This brings me to the point of a CHC in my own community, Le Centre de santé communautaire de Sudbury, which operates two satellites in Rayside-Balfour and Valley East in my riding, primarily francophone communities. In the fall of 1995, under the Conservatives, the then assistant deputy minister, Mr. Szende, wrote to the president and promised that \$1 mil-

lion in capital funding would be made available to two or more satellite clinics in the outlying communities where it was clear there was a need for services to francophones. Since that time, the Conservatives, and now this Liberal government, have refused to provide the funding to Le Centre de santé communautaire de Sudbury to expand the satellites in Ryside-Balfour and Valley East, and that is a shame. It is clear that if those satellites were funded, then francophones would move to the centre and become patients of the centre, and many doctors who now service those francophone patients would have space available to treat anglophones.

It is wrong for this government to deny funding to the centre because the government insists that the services be bilingual. Francophones in this province have a right to French-language services under Bill 8, and that includes those francophones who live in Ryside-Balfour and in Valley East. This government is going to end up with its own Montfort Hospital—the day is coming—because francophones in our community are going to challenge this decision to deny funding to this centre.

I say to the minister, do what is right; do it now. Provide funding so that francophones in Valley East and Ryside-Balfour can get access to health care services in their own language, like they deserve.

DIABETES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): With respect to the statement made by the Minister of Health Promotion, I wish the minister would have stood today and said what his government was going to do in response to the presentation that was made by the Canadian Diabetes Association during the pre-budget consultations in February of this year, when they came before that committee and urged this government to expand its Ontario monitoring for health program to include those diabetics who don't qualify now because their diabetes is controlled by oral medication; to have the program pay for needles, syringes and insulin pumps; and to increase the reimbursement cost of these supplies because the current reimbursement cost doesn't cover the full cost of supplies. Has this government responded to any of these needs? No, they have not.

Finally, poor Mr. Gravelle, a member of the government side, introduced a bill to have insulin pumps covered in April 2004. His bill was passed unanimously at second reading and sat in committee for 16 months before it finally died when this government had a new session of Parliament. Why don't you at least pass—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Acting Premier. I'm sure you're aware

of the tragic circumstances involving 37-year-old Lori Dupont, a nurse who was stabbed to death at the Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital in Windsor on Saturday. I think I speak for all of us here in extending our heartfelt sympathies to her family, and especially to the eight-year-old daughter that she leaves behind.

According to media reports, Ms. Dupont applied for a restraining order against her former partner, a doctor who worked at the hospital, in April and she was told that the next available court date to have that application for a restraining order heard would be in December. That is an eight-month delay. Without asking you to comment specifically on the details of any case, can you inform the House as to how an eight-month delay is possible for anyone, anywhere, any time in Ontario in the justice system for which your government is responsible?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): It is a terrible, terrible, terrible, tragic thing that has happened, and we certainly add our voices to that of the leader of the official opposition in offering our condolences to her daughter and to her family. As the member said, the matter is subject right now to a criminal investigation, so we cannot get into the specifics of it. Certainly I am in the process of determining exactly who knew what and when, and at the same time doing so without in any way interfering with the criminal investigation that's underway.

Mr. Tory: Carrying on in that regard, according to the Windsor Star this morning, the hospital where Ms. Dupont worked had been providing security guards to help her to her car. The hospital helped her in preparing the restraining order and reserved a parking spot for her next to the security office at the hospital, so it's clear that the hospital took precautions to help ensure her safety. Where the system seems to have fallen down was Ontario's justice system, for which you have ultimate responsibility. Are you prepared to use your offices to find out how many of these kinds of applications are pending across the province, the kinds of delays they are experiencing and the reasons why, and to let all of us know—the public and this Legislature—the results of those inquiries on a timely basis?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: There are indeed some questions that need some answers, and I agree with the member that we need to determine what the facts are. I recognize that the member is relying upon media reports, and of course the police are in the process of their own investigation. I don't wish to do anything to interfere with that. But certainly we need to determine, on both the criminal and civil sides, whether or not we need to be making any changes and assess the situation immediately. In a further supplementary, I can speak to some actions that have been well underway since this government took power to address these fundamental issues and protections when it comes to protecting women from becoming victims of domestic violence.

Mr. Tory: Of course, I was dealing with the question of process, and I remind the Attorney General that I had asked him whether he could give us a list and a number

as to how many of these kinds of applications are pending across the province and the kinds of delays they are experiencing. I think our interest here is to ensure that no woman, no partner in a violent or potentially violent situation should be made to wait until it's too late for justice. I think we all agree in this House that that is just not acceptable. As the government of Ontario, you have the responsibility to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure this doesn't happen again.

We have here an instance in which a person was murdered while waiting for a date to have a hearing with regard to a restraining order. Can the Attorney General immediately cause, or can the government immediately cause, through the Attorney General's office, to be issued whatever directive it would take to ensure that in applications of this kind an eight-month delay is declared and stipulated to be unacceptable and that urgency is to be the rule, as opposed to any exception at all? Can you give us that undertaking?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: Well, it's true that urgency is the rule. That is why we launched the Ontario domestic assault risk assessment tool. That is a tool that involves police, crown prosecutors and others who assess the risk in abusive situations. They have a series of tests and a checklist to go through to determine where there are urgent situations and assure that the matter is given the highest priority. That is something this government launched. It is a tool that had not been available before, and it is a tool that we are continuing to pursue to try to prevent tragedies from taking place.

1430

SENTENCING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): It's a bit frustrating, because I asked for a list of these incidents and a directive to be issued.

My new question is for the Attorney General. You issued a report to your federal counterparts last week asking for tougher sentencing, but didn't offer any suggestions or any specifics as to what an appropriate sentence might be, an appropriate mandatory sentence for crimes involving the use of a firearm. The federal minister was equally non-specific. For certain offences today, the minimum stipulated in the Criminal Code is one year. You have said that is not acceptable.

Can you share with us exactly how long you think a sentence should be for someone convicted under the current provisions, how long we should make the sentence? And for some of the new offences that I think you've correctly suggested should be created, can you suggest to us some specifics here so we know exactly what you are advocating to the federal government as to minimum sentences for the commission of a crime involving guns?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): The highest constitutionally appropriate sentence that can be brought down to express Parliament's extreme denunci-

ation of these horrific gun crimes and to ensure that appropriate punishments and deterrents are in place.

Mr. Tory: Well, the problem we all have here is that, of course, is not a specific answer either, and the federal minister didn't help us either.

In any event, we'll move to another area that you have more direct responsibility for. It's something else you just haven't addressed, and it has been going on for some time: the issue of the kind of two-for-one and three-for-one deals, the sentencing credits for convicted criminals. Police officers have shared cases with me, as I'm sure they have with you, where they have arrested someone, the person is charged, the person is convicted, and the very same day that their sentence is pronounced upon them, they walk out of the courtroom because your crown prosecutors have made a three-for-one deal to give people three days' credit for every day they've served before trial.

Ontarians instinctively know this is wrong. Will you take immediate steps to ensure that these two-for-one and three-for-one let's-make-a-deal arrangements are not bought into by your prosecutors and are not something your prosecutors agree to? Will you take that step?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: We're actually a little bit ahead of that, I say to the leader of the official opposition. Last week in Whitehorse we achieved quite an historic accord. We had all provinces agree, firstly, to immediate changes to bring forth increases in mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes, new offences to reflect the supply of legal guns into the illegal gun market, and also an agreement federally and provincially that in fact the federal government would work upon the recommendation made by Ontario and Manitoba such that we would have a reverse onus put into place so that if it was a gun crime and a violent offence that was involved, the onus would be—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Tory: I actually asked about the two-for-one and three-for-one deals, which we never got to.

But having said that, my final supplementary is also to the minister. What's needed here in some cases is immediate solutions, a sense of urgency about these things, whether it has to do with mandatory minimum sentencing or whether it has to do with these let's-make-a-deal, two-for-one and three-for-one deals.

Another area where you've overpromised and under-delivered is on the 1,000 new police officers on the street. This morning, your colleague the Minister of Community Safety claimed that 400 of these officers have already been hired and are to be paid retroactively to 2003. Exactly when—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock.

Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: Exactly when can the municipalities expect to see the cheques totalling \$28 million for your share of these officers, and since you obviously know right now which police services, if you can come up with a precise number of 400, will you commit to bring the list

to this House, to this Legislature, of exactly which communities have had how many new officers hired, and have the cheques been sent to those communities to cover the costs of those officers?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I want to congratulate Monte Kwinter, the Minister of Community Safety, for putting 400 new officers on the streets and 1,000 to come.

We welcome the agreement of all provinces and the federal government to bring forth new mandatory minimum sentences and new gun crimes. In fact, although I understand he doesn't understand the answer, I'll speak slowly. Bringing forth a reverse onus for bail for gun crimes means that we are going to be requiring that everybody who is before the court involving a gun crime and involving bail has to themselves prove that they ought not to be in jail. Between the guns and gangs task force, the 1,000 more police officers, the additional 26 police officers announced two weeks ago, the additional crown attorneys brought forth, an agreement by the federal government to have a federal-provincial guns and gangs task force, sir, that's not like the stuff that you used to do when you were in government: all talk. We are all action when it comes to gun crime.

PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Acting Premier. Today there is no local medical officer of health standing guard for ordinary families in one third of Ontario's local health units. In Brant, Chatham-Kent, Elgin, Haldimand, Lambton, Oxford, Simcoe, Muskoka and Timiskaming there is no medical officer of health. Why? Because the McGuinty government refuses to come up with the money so that health units can carry out basic services.

My question is this: Will you commit today to hiring full-time medical officers of health for every health unit in Ontario without delay?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the honourable member will know if he wants to, the situation concerning having full all of the rolls of medical officers of health in our province is something that, quite frankly, has eluded us for well over a decade. That's a circumstance that has been ongoing while all parties in this House were governments in Ontario. That is an explanation; it is not an excuse.

Accordingly, we're working very hard to revitalize public health in this province. That has involved an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars to date. Public health units in this province this year received not only an increment increase where the province took back a share of costs, but also a 9% increase for growth. This is a reflection on the commitment that our government continues to make. Under the leadership of Dr. Basrur and schools like McMaster, we're working hard to produce the future medical officers of health, but I will acknowledge to the honourable member that this is a piece of work that we have more to do on.

Mr. Hampton: I'm surprised at the Minister of Health's response, because it wasn't that long ago that

someone named Dalton McGuinty said that not having medical officers of health in place was a violation of the law—not just an administrative problem but a violation of the law.

Here's what the Ontario Medical Association says: Ontario is not prepared for a pandemic like avian flu because the McGuinty government has underfunded public health, because local public health units don't have the resources for even basic tasks like inspecting restaurants, and because we don't have enough local medical officers of health to stand guard for ordinary families' health. Then they say, "A public health emergency could strike at any day."

A simple question, Minister: Will you hire the eight medical officers of health who are not in place today, which your Premier describes as a breach of the law?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The member is choosing, as normal, to be rather selective in his analysis of the circumstances at hand. There is plenty of evidence—it abounds, in fact—of the investments and the initiatives that our government has undertaken with respect to rebuilding public health. There are interim medical officers of health acting in every one of the public health units in the province of Ontario.

With respect to planning in our province related to the challenges, those known and unknown, we've done a tremendous amount of work. We have a public health agency in our province that's coming to life next year. There's active work on its role. We've increased quite dramatically the funding for our public health units, as I alluded to in my earlier answer. We've established a provincial infectious disease advisory committee that's working hard, and new software, IPHIS, that we spent tens of millions of dollars developing, along with the 180 infectious disease officers that we're fully funding in these public health units. These are just some of the initiatives that we've taken to protect the health of Ontarians.

1440

Mr. Hampton: I repeat the words of Dalton McGuinty: He described interim medical officers of health as a breach of the law; part-time medical officers of health as a breach of the law. That was your Premier.

I want to quote again from the Ontario Medical Association. They say that Ontario's public health system should be second to none, but they then say that Ontario's public health system is "the worst of all the provinces." Dr. Greg Flynn, the president of the Ontario Medical Association says, "Our public health system is broken. It remains unprepared for challenges we know it must meet."

It was Dalton McGuinty who said to the people of Ontario, "Choose change." Tell me, Minister, where's the change when the Ontario Medical Association calls Ontario's public health system the worst of all the provinces?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: On the issue of responsibility and accountability for words, I believe the honourable member would be doing a better service to Ontarians if

he stood in this place and acknowledged that it was the leadership exerted by his government which has resulted in some of the chronic challenges we have with doctor shortages in our province. Public health, we all acknowledge, is one of those areas in our health care system that was allowed, especially under the previous government, to diminish.

Accordingly, since arriving in office we've worked very, very hard and contributed considerable new resources to enhance the quality of our public health system. On this idea that has been advanced today by the OMA, of course it's appropriate to call for areas where there's more that can be done; but I think it's inappropriate, particularly as there is no objective way to measure the quality of our public health system—I think that we've worked very, very hard, and Ontario's capacities are growing every day. This is important news for the people of Ontario.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Again to the Acting Premier: Your hydro rate policy of driving electricity rates through the roof is proving more expensive for ordinary Ontario families. In community after community your policy of driving electricity rates through the roof is shutting down factories, mills and plants, killing jobs and hurting entire communities. On Friday, Ontario Power Generation, the company you control, reported an extraordinary profit of \$181 million for one quarter. That's not their money; that's the people's money.

My question: Will you instruct Ontario Power Generation to roll out a rebate and return that \$181 million to the people who are already paying too much in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): Thank you to the honourable member for his question. In fact, after the 5%, Ontario Power Generation's profit goes to pay the stranded debt, so in fact it does go back to the people of Ontario—to all the people of Ontario.

Mr. Hampton: As we see paper mill after paper mill close, as we now see the steel industry threatened, I don't think anyone is going to find any solace in that answer.

I want to quote from Adam White, the president of the Association of Major Power Consumers in Ontario. He says, "It's unconscionable that Ontario Power Generation should be reporting record profits while high electricity prices are causing plant closures and layoffs, and people are worried about finding money to pay their power bill."

We know that the money has come from the people and it has come from Ontario industries. Will you instruct Ontario Power Generation to return that \$181 million to the people today through a rebate? Yes or no, Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Thank you again for the question. I state quite emphatically that the OPG is permitted to keep the 5% return and the rest goes to pay down the

stranded debt, which, by the way, is \$20.9 billion. That's money that people have to pay anyway. This way they actually get to reduce that amount of money. I find it interesting as well that the concern is—in fact, we have just brought in over \$700 million to the province in renewable energy projects and \$3 billion in new projects in future generation that are currently underway or in the process of being underway. So in fact we are contributing to this economy, sir.

Mr. Hampton: The minister says the McGuinty government is contributing to the economy. Here's the reality: Ontario has lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs, most of them casualties of the McGuinty government's policy of driving electricity rates through the roof. The forest industry is in crisis, with 12 mills, 7,500 direct jobs and 17,500 indirect jobs at risk. That's what's happening out there because of your policy of driving electricity rates through the roof, and now we know that Ontario Power Generation took \$181 million out of the pockets of Ontario consumers in the last quarter alone.

Minister, how many jobs is the McGuinty government prepared to kill? How many communities are you going to decimate before you realize that your policy of driving electricity rates through the roof is a destructive one? Will you return the money now?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: The money has been returned. It has gone to pay down the stranded debt.

It's fascinating: When I was doing my reading, a little bit of homework, this was the government that I think purchased land in Costa Rica for a rain forest. I think there were other governments involved in purchasing or paying for a yacht.

We've actually put the money back into the stranded debt. Five per cent is the amount they're able to keep and the rest goes to pay down the stranded debt. I don't know, but \$20.9 billion, to me, is a lot of money. Maybe it isn't to the honourable member.

Mr. Hampton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wish to give notice of dissatisfaction—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): You can do that by filing with the table. New question.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Education. Sexual harassment, forcible confinement, criminal harassment, sexual assault: Those are the charges against a 16-year-old following what Christie Blatchford in the *Globe and Mail* today noted as a "campaign of terror" against a young teenager over an 18-month period of time. That campaign of terror took place in one of our public schools in this city, apparently without a teacher or a principal knowing that it was taking place. Minister, what do you have to say about that?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I'm sure that anyone in this House apprised of the details of that story extends the greatest of sympathy to the person affected.

Of course, we are constrained in this House not to discuss the details of an individual case like that. What I will say is this: We are, this week in fact, going to be strengthening the protections we have within the system, to make sure that for the first time in Ontario there is a comprehensive approach to activating every person—not just the teachers but every person on school property in terms of prevention of bullying. I would say that the kind of terror that is described in that article goes to the heart of why we—all of us—bear a responsibility to make sure that that finally happens.

Mr. Klees: Minister, this should be a wake-up call to you, as Minister of Education, to note that there's a serious supervision problem in that school. It should be a wake-up call to you that if it's happening in that school, it is probably happening in others.

My question to you is this: Will you now take seriously a warning that was issued to you by the Ontario Principals' Council following your negotiation of a collective agreement that strips supervision time from contracts throughout the province?

They said in that letter, and I quote: "Supervision is an issue that has been an ongoing concern for us, since a decrease in supervision time has a direct and negative impact on our ability to keep our schools safe. We are therefore alarmed to learn that school boards across the province appear to be negotiating this limit on supervision time without regard for the preconditions established in the memorandum."

Minister, will you undertake to ensure that supervision—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

1450

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'm sure the honourable member opposite is not trying to link, in the juxtaposition of his questions, problems experienced by principals in some schools as the start-up of a new kind of arrangement at some schools where there is an absolute override that no compromise can be made to school safety or, indeed, to the cost to the board or the government. He knows that. And I'm sure the member opposite is not trying to link that at the commission, on anyone's part, with the tragedy in the article in the paper today because, if he is, he is linking a situation in which he does not have the facts—and we are constrained to deal with the facts in this House—to administrative things that are being worked out.

I've met with the principals' association. I've met with a number of the people involved. We have a provincial stability commission addressing that directly. What we need is what hasn't happened under the administration of the gentleman opposite and didn't happen in the previous government: a serious approach to detecting, preventing and stamping out bullying in our schools. It didn't take place under that previous government. I'm happy to tell you that this week we'll give you details on how it will take place under this government.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I have a question for the Attorney General. I want to follow up on the question by the Leader of the Opposition.

Lori Dupont, a nurse and single mother of an eight-year-old girl, was stabbed to death on the job at a hospital in Windsor. Ms. Dupont had feared for her safety for some time. The hospital took her concerns seriously but the justice system let her down. She applied for a peace bond against a former boyfriend and co-worker in April, but it was contested and the hearing was delayed until December, eight months later.

I want to ask you again, what is your government doing to ensure a prompt hearing in a situation where a woman's life is in danger, and to ensure that this never happens again?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I say again, as Mr. Hampton would have said when he was the Attorney General, that I can't speak to the specifics of the matter because a criminal investigation is underway.

A restraining order can be obtained as a civil remedy under family law. A person can get one from a court without the named person knowing about it. A peace bond, which was sought here under section 810 of the Criminal Code, is a criminal remedy available to anyone and, as such, the criminal process then takes over.

We are asking the very questions that the member is asking right now, to determine who knew what and when. I can assure the member that I share her concern, and I think every member of this Legislature shares her concern, to find out what happened and to see if there is anything that we can do to prevent it from happening in the future.

Ms. Churley: Minister, Gillian Hadley, May-Iles, and on and on—the very nature of the application was because she feared for her safety. Lori Dupont asked for a peace bond restraining order in April. She never got it, and now she never will.

Women are dying, and unfortunately your government seems more interested in saving money than in saving these women's lives. For years, women have asked for and recommendations have asked for standardized risk assessments in determining bail for better enforcement of restraining orders for action on the court backlogs that leave women waiting for peace bonds. And all we have are pilot projects.

How many more women are going to have to die before your government takes action and makes these pilot projects permanent? When, Minister, is it going to happen?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: Mr. Speaker, I am going to refer that supplementary to the minister responsible for women's issues.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): It's very difficult to sit and listen to such a question when this member herself was at yet another announcement at the expert training panels on domestic violence this morning. She knows better than any that

this government has done more on this issue than any in history. We have an extremely large and all-encompassing domestic violence action plan. One of the largest pillars of this is the justice sector. While we are working diligently to review restraining orders so that they're done in a consistent way, in this case, the most tragic of all, in my own hometown, when I had to know about a nurse who was killed on the job, and you would suggest for a moment—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Order. The member for Toronto–Danforth will come to order. I will name the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Minister.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: All of us in this House know that one of the significant pillars of our action plan is the justice sector. What we know happened over this past weekend, those kinds of—

Interjection.

The Speaker: I name the member for Toronto–Danforth, Ms. Churley.

Ms. Churley was escorted from the chamber.

PRIX D'EXCELLENCE

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Ma question s'adresse à la ministre de la Culture.

Au début du mois, vous avez participé à la remise des Prix d'excellence pour les subventions bien méritées de la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario, édition 2005. Parmi les finalistes éligibles pour obtenir un prix était le spectacle l'Écho d'un peuple de Francoscénie, qui a eu lieu dans ma circonscription lors des deux derniers étés. Madame la Ministre, pouvez-vous partager avec nous quels sont les Prix d'excellence, et comment Franco-scénie est-elle venue à être nommée finaliste pour un de ces prix?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Premièrement, je voudrais remercier le député de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell pour sa participation à l'événement, et aussi tous ceux et celles qui ont participé. Alors, un gros merci.

Lancés en 2002 par la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario, les Prix d'excellence pour les subventions bien méritées rendent hommage aux organismes qui ont su profiter des subventions octroyées par la fondation pour créer des retombées au sein de leur communauté et pour l'ensemble de la population ontarienne. L'édition 2005 des Prix d'excellence présente de magnifiques exemples de subventions ayant servi à promouvoir davantage la mission de la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario, qui est de favoriser l'épanouissement des communautés saines et dynamiques en Ontario en investissant dans des initiatives communautaires qui renforcent les capacités du secteur bénévole.

Les Prix d'excellence pour les subventions bien méritées sont décernés dans les quatre secteurs de financement de la fondation : arts et culture, environne-

ment, services sociaux, sports et loisirs. Les finalistes des Prix d'excellence pour les subventions bien méritées ont été choisis parmi 3 800 bénéficiaires. Je suis—

Le Président (L'hon. Michael A. Brown): Merci. Thank you.

M. Lalonde: Merci, madame la Ministre. C'était en effet un prix bien mérité pour un spectacle très éducatif sur l'histoire des Franco-Ontariens. Pour la population de Prescott et Russell—oui, je dis la meilleure circonscription de l'Ontario—l'Écho d'un peuple de Francoscénie est plus qu'un spectacle musical à grand déploiement qui célèbre 400 ans de présence francophone en Amérique du Nord. Lancée en 2004, l'Écho d'un peuple est la plus importante réalisation artistique de la région. Cette production a attiré plus de 30 000 spectateurs durant sa première saison, puis elle a remporté le prestigieux prix Trille Or de l'Association des professionnels de la chanson et de la musique, décerné au meilleur événement musical en 2005.

Comment la Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario a-t-elle contribué au succès de Francoscénie et de l'Écho d'un peuple, ainsi qu'au succès des organismes qui ont bénéficié d'une subvention de la Fondation Trillium?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Oui, en effet, comme j'ai dit tantôt, Francoscénie a remporté le Prix d'excellence dans la catégorie arts et culture. Francoscénie a reçu de la Fondation Trillium en 2005 une subvention de 30 000 \$. Les retombées de la production musicale ont atteint plus d'un million de dollars dans la région de Prescott-Russell. Les bénévoles ont bâti la scène, ont préparé le spectacle, et sont montés sur les planches soir après soir.

Cet argent a servi également à faire la promotion du spectacle. Ce spectacle, une vitrine sur l'histoire des francophones de l'Ontario, est maintenant un outil d'enseignement dans les écoles de langue française. L'Écho d'un peuple témoigne en fait de l'esprit d'une communauté, la communauté francophone de Prescott-Russell.

Je voudrais féliciter tous ceux et celles qui, de près et de loin, ont travaillé à la réalisation de ce spectacle extraordinaire. Merci.

1500

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is for the Minister of Health. On October 17, Suzanne Aucoin from St. Catharines and 21 other cancer patients attended question period. I asked a question seeking your support for their cancer treatments in Ontario. Since then, Suzanne Aucoin has been rejected twice by your government. It took your government two days to reject her application for out-of-province coverage for life-saving intravenous chemotherapy treatment. She is maxing out her Visa card to simply stay alive to receive these treatments near Buffalo. My question to you, Minister: Why isn't your ministry working with this young woman to help save her life?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The government of Ontario, through

its agency Cancer Care Ontario, is working actively every day to save the lives of people with cancer. This has included, of course, significant new investments in regional cancer centres and a more than 1,000% increase in new cancer drug funding. These, I think, speak of our commitment to addressing issues that people have related to cancer.

There will be circumstances when people seek treatments that are made available in other parts of the world. In accordance with that, the Health Services Appeal and Review Board is involved to offer appeals on any decisions related to out-of-province coverage. It has always been the case that there are treatments available in the world that the government of Ontario is or has not been in a position to fund. As we rely on scientific evidence as the basis for these decisions, I continue to rely on people like that for advice.

Mr. Jackson: I think Suzanne Aucoin came to Queen's Park today, as she is in the gallery, trying to seek support from her Minister of Health. You see, her application for out-of-province coverage, containing some 25 pages, also included an article in the Mississauga News of July 13, wherein one Mario Codispoti is getting treatment—the exact same treatment for the exact same cancer. He's having it paid for by your ministry, and yet Suzanne Aucoin's was rejected.

This is what the Codispoti family said about this process: "The whole process is absolutely disgusting and criminal. What the government is doing is deciding if people live or if they die."

Minister, we know of four cases where you're paying for treatment in Buffalo. We would ask you again, why are bureaucrats in your ministry deciding that Mario should live and that Suzanne should die?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I suppose it's very nice to offer some suggestion that it's bureaucrats. But the honourable member, who served as an associate minister in this very same ministry, understands the process well. He knows that the process is one that, like in many other ways related to the delivery of health care services, involves scientific advice. Accordingly, not all treatments are well suited to the same individuals, not all presentations are identical, and science is used to determine these very, very difficult circumstances. I'm very happy to take up the suggestion that the honourable member offers to try to help determine if that's the case, as I believe it is. But I do think that it has been a long-standing circumstance in our province that we have depended upon clinical advice to guide us in these very, very important decisions. That is the case that has been followed in this circumstance, but at the honourable member's suggestion, we will take it up again.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Health. Last Monday, staff at Bluewater Health in Sarnia were told that 10 of the 13 security personnel will be laid off in April 2006. These job losses relate directly to your demand that the hospital

balance its budget by the end of this fiscal year. Management and front-line staff are very concerned about how these job cuts will impact on the safety of patients, staff and visitors who access the hospital sites. My question is, how will you guarantee the safety of everyone who uses Bluewater Health in the face of these cuts?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Bluewater, like all other hospitals in the province of Ontario, has received significant new funding this year, as they have in each of the past two years that it has been our privilege to offer funding to Ontario's hospitals. At the same time, Bluewater is obligated to be a hospital that operates well in comparison to its peer hospitals. It had started out a process that included peer review with the active engagement of a CEO from a local hospital, with a view toward trying to help Bluewater get its cost basis in a fashion that is consistent with its peer hospitals, which is appropriate.

This is a community where we wish to make a significant new capital announcement. Accordingly, I can confirm that the local community and the peer reviewer from a local hospital have been working through solutions to address these underlying concerns. We believe in community-based governments, and accordingly, we have been supportive of the actions of the board to address the underlying fiscal circumstances there.

Ms. Martel: The question concerns security at the hospital. You see, Bluewater Health now has 13 full-time security staff 24 hours a day at the two hospital sites. The cuts mean that there will not be full-time staff at the Norman Street site, where Alzheimer's patients reside. Those cuts are in addition to the eight to nine orderlies who are also going to be laid off at the Alzheimer's unit in January. Nurses who work in the methadone clinic have also expressed concerns that if things go wrong in the clinic, they will not be physically able to restrain patients. Management, for its part, is suggesting that dietary, housekeeping and custodial staff be trained to respond to code white situations involving violent patients. I think that response is unacceptable.

I again ask the Minister of Health: These cuts are happening because you have demanded that the hospital balance its budget, so what are you going to do to protect the safety of the staff, the patients and the visitors who access these sites?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member is suffering from the same malady as her colleague in the front row, which is limited memory, because the circumstances are such that the honourable member asking the question was part of a government that brought forward a multi-\$100-million cut to hospitals. There are only two parties in this Legislature that have done that, and they're both on that side of the House.

We continue to support the efforts that local hospitals will make because we fundamentally believe in community-based governance, that people closer to the action will be in a position to make those decisions.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I'm heckled by the former Minister of Health. She was part of a government that

was often very used to installing supervisors to take over hospitals.

We believe in community-based governance, and accordingly, we have supported the actions that Bluewater Health has taken to get their hospital in a circumstance where it compares favourably to its peer hospitals, which we think is appropriate, not only in that community, but in all other communities as well.

STUDENT DROPOUT RATE

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is for the Minister of Education. When our government came to office, we promised we would improve the education system in Ontario. Specifically, we promised to address the rising dropout rate experienced during the previous government's mandate. My constituents are happy that there is a new tone of co-operation between teachers, school boards and the Ontario government, but they want to ensure that our government is accountable when it comes to education. They want tangible proof that our plan is really working. Minister, how do we know that our government's plan is producing real, tangible results?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I want to thank the honourable member for his question. There is no doubt that it is important that we have a climate, for the first time in probably 10 or 15 years, that is actually one of co-operation between the different sectors within education, but it does only set a platform for progress. I'm pleased to report to this House that we have already seen some increase in terms of graduation rates. The legacy of the previous government is a 56% four-year graduation rate, compared to 80% in some other provinces: We have that up to 60%. The five-year graduation rate was 68%; it's now up to about 71% or 72%.

Those are numbers. What really matters is that there are 6,000 students who now have a better future, people who have a diploma and access to what to do. Those are results that we hope will be held to account for every initiative that the government has, that students are materially better off and have better access to their future because their education, finally, is working for them.

Mr. Zimmer: While the decrease in the dropout rate is good news for my constituents, I'd like to know how our government plans to bring down the dropout rate even further and provide pathways for at-risk students in my riding of Willowdale.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: There's the critic from the third party laughing on the other side of the House when there are still 45,000 students who need access to a better future. It will take a considered initiative, and it deserves the support of the member opposite. It deserves the support of all members in this House. The high school graduation rate needs to be based on the accomplishment of a high standard for a lot more of the students we have. This is not a reflection of their potential. It may be a reflection of the commitment from previous govern-

ments—that may be possible—but I wouldn't even ascribe it completely there.

This fall there are student success teachers in every school in the province. They are providing individualized attention, as they should, to every struggling student. In addition, we're soon bringing forward legislation that will help create a framework for success. But most importantly, there are programs to bring students into success in the different courses we have in high school, to make sure they have the best chance possible—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

1510

METIS NATION AGREEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. A few short weeks ago, when speaking about Kashechewan, both you and the Premier said that you wish the federal government would honour its agreements with aboriginal people. Minister, why are you now breaking your agreement with the Métis Nation of Ontario?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I'd like to say to the member that the Metis are hunting in the vast majority of the land base of Ontario, probably up to about 85% of it. This is an area where we recognize the historical connection of the hunt and to communities, as was spelled out in Powley Supreme Court decision two years ago. What we've entered into is a four-point framework agreement that we carry on the research together to ensure there is that historical connection in the rest of the province.

Mr. Miller: Minister, you didn't answer my question. I know about the four-point agreement. That's why Tony Belcourt, president of the Métis Nation of Ontario, and Gary Lipinski were here at Queen's Park today doing a press conference, because you, the Premier and the Attorney General, according to Tony Belcourt, were personally involved in negotiating this four-point agreement, and they like the agreement. It's very specific, it's responsible, it's limited and controlled, it has a maximum number of 1,250 harvester licences and it's in their traditional areas.

The question is, you made this agreement with them; why are you not honouring it? Why are you not keeping your word and fulfilling the agreement you made? Why are you forcing them into the courts now? Who will benefit, other than lawyers, from this court action?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: As in most agreements, the difference here is how one interprets that agreement, and we have a difference of interpretation with this agreement. I think the member must understand, like other members of the House, that nobody in the Ontario Legislature or the government of Ontario can confer rights upon anybody in this province. That is something the Supreme Court would do or the Parliament of Canada through constitutional amendments. Therefore, we have to work under the letter of the law, which in this case is the Powley decision from the Supreme Court.

We are, quite frankly, interpreting that decision very generously in our agreement with the MNO. We continue to work with them and certainly ask them to come to the table and continue to work with us.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Energy. On Friday, Metal Technologies in Woodstock announced it was closing its doors and laying off 160 employees. The plant, which is a fixture in Woodstock, has been in operation for over 100 years. It makes automotive castings.

Metal Technologies is not alone, though. This year alone, 42,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the province of Ontario. From steel to forest products to auto casting operations, the McGuinty hydro policy is killing jobs.

Minister, what are you going to do to stop the damage being done to the Ontario manufacturing sector due to your job-killing hydro policy? How about listening to the association of major power users and return OPG's \$181 million in profits to Ontario families and manufacturing companies?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): This is the same party that not long ago was condemning these corporations for X number of things—taxes, and doing all sorts of things to the public—and now you've become some sort of saviour. I find it absolutely fascinating.

I think I said earlier that in fact 5% is a recoverable amount from OPG that goes to their base earnings and the rest of it goes to pay off the stranded debt.

We also are conveniently forgetting that Woodstock is going to get a new green plant at Toyota and the fact that DMI has just come into Fort Erie with a new wind turbine plant.

Ms. Horwath: Unfortunately, the number of jobs leaving the province of Ontario in the manufacturing sector far, far outweighs the ones we're gaining.

At that point in time, that company had already invested, in 2004, \$8 million in a capital retooling project and was doing everything it could possibly do to be competitive. But in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, energy-intensive companies in forest products, steel and auto casting just can't make it because of your another-one-bites-the-dust, job-killing energy policy.

The association of major power users is asking your government to return to the people and businesses of Ontario the \$181 million in profits that OPG pocketed because of this summer's long heat wave. I'm asking the same of you, Minister. I'm asking you to give back OPG's summer bonus bucks that they gained over three months this past summer. Will you take the advice of the Stelcos, Dofascos and Alcans of Ontario and rebate the \$181 million? Will you at least do that?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I don't know how many times I have to say this: OPG retains 5%. The rest of the money goes to pay down the stranded debt. It does not go into anybody's pocket.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): So everything's OK.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Well, what has happened, as a matter of fact—

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: It was OK when you lost 1,000 jobs a week in the previous government?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): You, 1,000 a week.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: A thousand a week. The fact of the matter is, it's a \$20.9-billion debt. It has to be paid down. All Ontarians benefit from this when that debt is paid down. You may not like it, but the fact of the matter is that \$3 billion in new money has come into this province with the new generation, both renewable and non-, in the last while. That is a fact.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Municipalities are strapped for cash and face significant challenges to invest appropriately in their important and much-needed infrastructure projects. This government is creating and improving viable tools for municipal governments to build, renovate and finance their local infrastructure needs. One of those tools is the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority, or OSIFA. Minister, could you tell us more about this innovative tool for municipal infrastructure financing?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I want to thank the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for the question. The Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority, or OSIFA, is a tool that we created to allow municipalities to access low-cost, long-term and fixed-rate financing to meet critical municipal infrastructure projects.

Back in the 2005 budget, the finance minister announced that OSIFA is being broadened to support provincial infrastructure initiatives in the university sector and in municipal tourism, culture and recreation. OSIFA's infrastructure renewal loan program for municipalities is currently helping more than 160 Ontario communities meet their infrastructure investment objectives. Pooled financing through OSIFA enables our government and, more importantly, our public sector partners to renew critical municipal infrastructure, long-term-care homes, universities and housing infrastructure projects. I'll have more in the supplementary.

1520

Mrs. Van Bommel: I want to thank the minister for his answer. I know that municipalities in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex are looking forward to using and applying for this excellent infrastructure financing tool. The municipalities of North Middlesex and Adelaide-Metcalfe have already received approvals of loans for \$12.8 million and \$420,000 respectively to

renew their public infrastructure. The municipality of Chatham-Kent and the counties of Lambton and Middlesex have already qualified for substantial loans. This financing program is helping municipalities in Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and all across the province tackle their infrastructure deficit. The expansion of this program exemplifies the way in which OSIFA and this government are working with Ontario's communities to maintain a strong working relationship and a prosperous future. Minister, can you please tell the Legislature and the people of Ontario how the program is helping their communities meet their infrastructure objectives now and in the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I'd like to share what a success story OSIFA has been with all members of the Legislature.

Speaker, you'd be interested to know that a majority of municipalities, in fact fully 88% of those borrowing from OSIFA, are smaller communities, with populations of less than 100,000 residents. Smaller communities, especially smaller rural and northern communities, achieve significant savings by borrowing through OSIFA.

But that's not all. Larger communities are also benefiting from OSIFA's low-cost, long-term, fixed-rate financing. All municipalities, large and small, urban and rural, can secure low interest rates for the entire life of the loan. To date, OSIFA has committed to provide more than 160 Ontario communities with up to \$2 billion in low-cost, longer-term loans for over 1,000 local infrastructure projects. OSIFA's infrastructure renewal loans are making a real difference in communities right across Ontario—

The Speaker: Thank you very much. New question.

COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. Despite the rhetoric about democratic renewal and public consultation, there has been no consultation with health stakeholders in this province about the new agenda in health, which many consider to be a hidden agenda, which includes the LHINs. We now learn that the government plans to reduce the number of community care access centres from 42 to 14. Minister, can you confirm that you will be reducing community care access centres from 42 to 14?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Quite to the contrary of the honourable member's suggestion, there has been an extensive amount of consultation, not only involving me personally, but my deputy minister has been doing a very, very extensive round of consultation.

We are working very hard in the ministry at the moment on a piece of legislation that will be forthcoming before the end of this session. I can't confirm for the honourable member all of the contents of that, but I can

assure her that as it moves forward, we'll be looking for the opportunity to bring it to the House, to have a debate here in this chamber, and presumably as well for the bill, with all-party support, to go out for some further committee work. I would just want to let the honourable member know that that's forthcoming. And in keeping with our tradition to date, the honourable member will mostly certainly be briefed in advance of the presentation of any such legislation.

Mrs. Witmer: Despite what the minister says, we do know that health stakeholders are increasingly becoming more concerned about the government's secret agenda. It all started with Bill 8, the attempt to eliminate hospital boards. I can also tell you they have now been informed that CCACs are going to be reduced to 14.

This minister talks about consultation. Consultation, for the Ministry of Health, involves someone getting a letter or someone getting a phone call, and, more often than not, being asked not to talk about it publicly.

I would ask the minister: If you are going to reduce the CCACs to 14, have you conducted an independent analysis of the cost of CCAC consolidation? Have you submitted this cost in submissions to cabinet, and if so, can you tell us how much this decision is going to cost, because there are going to be severance costs, legal costs—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: There would be, of course, with any significant changes to health care, one-term costs associated with it. But I want to return to the issue that the honourable member raised, which I really think is very, very unfair and quite unfortunate too. She speaks more specifically about a lack of consultation in the context of community care access centres. Obviously, you have some connection to these people, since you put many of them in place after you took away the responsibilities and powers of communities to appoint their own boards to community care access centres.

It was a steaming day in July or August in room 247 when I had all of the leadership of community care access centres here for a consultation. It was only two weeks ago that I spent quite a long period of time on a conference call with those same organizations. So to suggest, as the honourable member had, that there is no dialogue going on, that there is no consultation going on, that our affairs are being conducted in a private fashion, is regrettable and erroneous.

PETITIONS

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my name with full support.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that has been sent to me by Mr. Charles Plourde of North York, Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

"Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

"Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

"Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new ... drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the needs of patients."

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition here from a group of people in Brampton, Mississauga and Oakville to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding access to trades and professions, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise

their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I affix my signature to this petition and ask page Stephen to carry it for me.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I have a petition here from the staff at Simcoe Community Services in Orillia and Barrie. It reads:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I'm more than happy to sign this, and I'll pass it over to Nathan to present to you.

1530

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to present this petition on behalf of the riding of Niagara

Falls, signed by a number of people, including Yvonne and Bruce Walker. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most" individuals "and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance" plan.

I'm pleased to sign this petition in support.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada's first Nobel Prize recipient; and

"Whereas this great Canadian's original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth, is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

"Whereas the town of New Tecumseth, under the leadership of Mayor Mike MacEachern and former Mayor Larry Keogh, has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Culture and the Liberal government step in to ensure that the Banting homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come."

I have signed, and agree with, that petition.

CANCER TREATMENT

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that has been signed by 160 people and sent to me by Shirley Cornes of Aurora, Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

"Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exemption under the Ontario drug benefit plan, with no such exemption policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

"Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the

willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

"Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new ... drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exemptions to meet the needs of patients."

I agree with the petitioners, and I have affixed my signature to this.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to stand and support my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, in this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan does not cover the cost of the PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

"Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer, and the PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We support Bill 201. We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance program. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week's worth of groceries for some individuals."

This is a very powerful petition. I'm pleased to affix my signature to it and to ask page Kumail to carry it down for me.

GAMMA FOUNDRIES

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas all residents in the town of Richmond Hill have the right to enjoy their homes, property, neighbourhood and to breathe clean air; and

"Whereas Gamma Foundries, a division of Victaulic Co. of Canada Ltd., is clearly the identifiable and documented source of noxious fumes and odours in the Newkirk Road area of Richmond Hill; and

"Whereas Gamma Foundries has persistently failed to respond to the legitimate concerns of the community regarding these odours and emissions; and

"Whereas Gamma Foundries has refused to initiate engineering solutions to these issues as identified in a report by EarthTech and as ordered by the Ministry of the Environment; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment has specifically directed Gamma Foundries to initiate engineered controls to address the adverse effects of these pollutants;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of the Environment to take all measures possible to enforce the provincial officer's order issued on November 3, 2005, and to ensure that residents are afforded the right to enjoy their property and neighbourhood as is their right under law."

I'm pleased to affix my personal signature to this petition, and I trust that the wishes of the residents will be adhered to.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I'm pleased to sign this petition.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the federal Income Tax Act at present has a minimum amount of medical expense for which a

taxpayer is entitled to claim a non-refundable income tax credit;

"Whereas the" tax "and medical expenses of every citizen in the province of Ontario, great or small, affects their overall net income;

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government moved in their 2004 budget on May 18 ... to delist publicly funded medical services such as chiropractic services, optometry examinations and physiotherapy services,

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Income Tax Act remove the present minimum amount of medical expense for which an Ontario taxpayer is entitled to claim a non-refundable income tax credit."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I have also signed this.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's my pleasure again to support my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, in this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, which reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of

sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

Speaker, it's a very powerful petition. I'm pleased to affix my signature to it and to once again ask page Kumail to carry it for me.

1540

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 31, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 197, An Act to implement budget measures / Projet de loi 197, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 197, the Budget Measures Act. That is what we're talking about today, correct? Thank you very much. It took me a little off guard there. I wasn't sure that I was on the roster right now.

So, the Budget Measures Act—yes, I guess I would ask just what this budget had—

Interjection: Just say it's a great budget.

Mr. Yakabuski: Who said that? I wish I could say that. There used to be great budgets in this House, but that was at another time—a better time.

What is in this budget for hard-working families, seniors, fixed-income people and businesses trying to keep their heads above water? What is in this budget for them? Nothing. It just simply is one of this government's—it goes back to last year. There's no credibility; none whatsoever. In fact, there's a poll out: They're rating the Premier. How many people believe he's unbelievable? And I don't mean "unbelievable" like, "That shooting star was unbelievable." He is a falling star; there is no question about that. He is a falling star, falling rapidly, and he is viewed as being very unbelievable by an amazing 21% of the people polled in this province. That is a scandalously high figure for a Premier in the middle of a term. And why has he reached those kinds of numbers? Because you can't believe a word he says. You simply can't believe it. The people have accepted that this man does not keep his promises—

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Clearly in this House either we have a rule that you can't say that somebody's misleading or not telling the truth, or you don't have the rule. If the rule is that you can, then I'll do that later on. But if it isn't, the member just violated that rule—

The Deputy Speaker: I'll listen more carefully. I didn't hear those words, but if the member said them, I give him the opportunity to withdraw. In other words, you can continue as well.

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I said anything unparliamentary, I withdraw it, even without being asked, because that would certainly not be my intention. I'm simply trying to articulate the feeling of the electorate out there when it comes to their opinions on how much they can depend on the word of this government and this Premier.

In the Premier's own words, I guess whatever he says would be OK because he has admitted to the people of Ontario—finally. It took a long time for this act of contrition, but he did say in early October, "Yes, I broke my promise. I told the people of Ontario that I would do certain things, and I didn't do that." Some people would say that when you say you're going to do something and you don't do that, they could categorize you as being something unparliamentary. I'm not going to say that, but apparently the Premier has characterized himself as that kind of person. Those were his own words to the press in early October, that he didn't keep his promises. In fact, he didn't keep over 50 promises.

One of those such promises was, "I won't raise your taxes." He has admitted that he wasn't dependable on that promise; he didn't keep his word on that. Other promises, such very important ones—you see, he stood in front of the television cameras, in front of reporters with pen in hand, and they wrote it down verbatim, as Dalton McGuinty, then opposition leader, stood in September 2003 and said to the people of Ontario, "I won't raise your taxes." Plain and simple; no need for an explanation: "I won't raise your taxes." As a matter of fact, only four weeks before they tabled the first budget, he repeated that he would not raise your taxes, and now he is on record as having admitted that he did not keep that very significant promise.

But what did the breaking of that promise mean? It may have been something that the Premier took months and months to finally build the gumption to come out and admit. You see, everybody in the province knew that that was the fact anyway. He wasn't hiding anything any more. Everybody knew that he was a promise-breaker. That's what they called him. But what did those broken promises mean to the average family in this province? What they have meant is over \$2,000 out of their pockets as a result of the inability of this government to manage its affairs and keep its promises.

If you look at the revenue of this province, it has gone up substantially, because this government really doesn't want to manage the finances. It just wants to revert back to that old Liberal way, the easy way: "Let's just take as much money as we possibly can out of the pockets of hard-working families, of fixed-income seniors, of dedicated, committed business people in this province. Let's just take whatever we can out of their pockets and we will spend it as we see fit, because we are Liberals. We know better than anyone. No one is better positioned to

make the decisions for the people in the province of Ontario than us, the Liberals." That's exactly the philosophy they live by, so they've got to build those revenues.

If I can go off topic just for a moment here—not off topic. I wouldn't do that. But you see that same Liberal practice coming out of those hooligans in Ottawa.

Interjections.

Mr. Yakabuski: I withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Yakabuski: I think there's actually a bar in Ottawa called Hooligan's, but anyway, that government in Ottawa—it's a disgrace to be running up the kinds of surpluses that they have run up on the backs of Canadians, and much of that surplus has been on the backs of Ontarians. The current government is embroiled in all kinds of scandals and nefarious acts, spinning it any way they possibly can to try to get something positive out of it, but what it comes down to, again, is that they have that same philosophy of just take whatever you can get out of the people, and then, when there's a problem, they just take the position, "We can fix it because we're going to spend some money on it." Of course they can spend money on it, because they've taken every red cent that people have in this country, and primarily out of the people of the province of Ontario.

1550

Getting back to Ontario now, you know what one fellow said to me? A constituent of mine said to me, "You know, every time I turn around, Dalton McGuinty has got his hand in my pocket. He is not going to be happy until finally he's going to reach in there and all he's going to get is lint. That's all he's going to get out of my pocket. He's going to get lint, because he's taken everything else that I've got, that I've worked for."

This was the province of opportunity, where you had unlimited potential to be whatever you wanted to be: to be successful, to be prosperous, because the opportunities were there, because government saw that this province had a tremendous potential to grow and rely on the expertise and the ingenuity of its people. This government has decided, "You know what? We're going to make all the decisions. We're going to make the world better."

You know one of the ways they think they're going to make the world better? Of course, when they were on this side of the House, they derided the former government for spending money on lawyers, private sector lawyers, when there are over 1,000 lawyers employed by the government.

I couldn't really believe it, but it's true; I have the documentation right in front of me: The current Attorney General—and this is from the Ottawa Citizen, a very reliable paper. I'm sure that the member for Ottawa-Orléans has a subscription to that, and he would concur that you could depend on this. "The former law firm of Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant and the firm where his wife is employed were among the highest-paid private firms retained by the ministry last year." Oh, they

were so against this practice. “Shame” on that former government, they shouted and screamed. Attorney General Michael Bryant was one of the loudest complainers that this was absolutely unacceptable. Do you know how much his former firm received from the province last year?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): How much?

Mr. Yakabuski: Almost half a million dollars. You know what that would mean in people’s pockets in Renfrew county, people who are struggling to get by? Half a million dollars—\$487,000. I don’t want to exaggerate, so I’ll give you the exact amount: \$487,000. That was the fourth-highest bill for the ministry.

Lo and behold, coming in sixth place at a paltry \$442,000 is the Attorney General’s wife, Susan Abramovitch, a partner at Goodman and Carr, the sixth-highest total at \$442,000.

Look at this: More than 60 lawyers, including 15 from his former firm, McCarthy Tétrault, were among the individuals who made political contributions to Mr. Bryant’s mid-town Toronto constituency association in 2004.

The total paid to private lawyers: \$12 million. Contrast that to the amount being paid to rural Ontarians if they were to get their fair share of the gas tax, which this government does not pay to anyone except a municipality that has a public transportation system. Contrast that \$12 million to the figure that rural municipalities are getting as a result of their gas tax rebate. That would be zero; \$12 million, zero. I wonder if anyone out there sees some inequity there.

Another thing that’s a big concern to Ontario taxpayers is not just this \$12 million that they paid out to law firms—and a huge amount of that is friends of the Attorney General—but what about this Ontario municipal partnership fund that this government was so proud of when they brought it in last year? You know, when you go around the province and you balance the winners and the losers, they tell you all about the winners, but they don’t tell you about the losers and they don’t tell you the absolutely desperate situation they’re going to be putting these municipalities in over the next five years as this agreement flows forward to its conclusion. They’re not talking about that. I suppose there are a lot of municipalities out there that are very concerned—I know they’re concerned about it—but perhaps they’re hoping that the terms of this agreement will significantly exceed the life of this government, because they’re going to need a real plan that addresses the needs of municipalities, in particular, rural municipalities, in Ontario.

What about agriculture? We’ve had one of the worst farm income crises that farmers have ever dealt with in the last couple of years, and what does this government do in this budget but whack the agriculture budget by 23%, reduce it by 23%. It’s lurching from crisis to crisis. They have absolutely no plan about how they’re going to deal with agriculture and food producers in the province of Ontario. They love to keep them dangling and hanging and praying that something will come out just before

desperation absolutely sets in. But they’re not interested in sitting down and working with people in the agricultural community to ensure that our food suppliers, who provide a tremendous amount of the economic activity—it’s the second-largest industry in this province. But the individual farmer is hurting significantly. Instead of addressing that, they prefer to lurch from crisis to crisis, and may ensure that farmers get action when they show up on the lawn of Queen’s Park. I would prefer to have our farmers working, increasing their productivity, supporting their families, as opposed to having to run down on their tractors to Queen’s Park to get some action out of this government.

A \$2.4-billion health tax: That was one of the biggest taxes, along with the other taxes, a hydro increase that they promised. They absolutely promised that they would maintain that hydro rate at 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour through 2006.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: It’s the promise we’re talking about, my friend, and they couldn’t break that soon enough.

What you really have to ask yourself, and this goes to the meat of the poll and the credibility of the Premier himself: Is this what we have gotten to in politics, that there was absolutely no intention, in any way, shape or form, for this party and this government to keep those promises? If that is what the plan was all along, then it’s no wonder that people have lost faith in politics and politicians.

1600

There is a committee doing its work right now on electoral reform, and there’s talk out there that we have to change, we have to improve the situation. They think that somehow they’re going to improve the situation by changing the way that people get here. That is not the problem facing government or the people in this province or any other democratically elected group under the British parliamentary system. The problem and the reason there’s a lack of confidence is because of what they see from governments once they are elected. There doesn’t seem to be a connection between what people say to get elected and what they do after they’re elected. If you want to restore confidence in the hearts and the minds of people, you have to accept and understand and commit that what you say when you’re campaigning for political office must match exactly what you do once elected.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to focus on these two points that were made by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: One was the hydro rate cap, that broken promise; and the health tax, that broken promise.

You see, as one who was here at the time the Conservative government brought in the rate cap in the first place, because after deregulation and privatization of hydro, rates were going through the roof and there was a crisis—in November 2002, before the election, and I might have my dates wrong, the former government was

then forced to bring in the rate cap because it was clear that deregulation wasn't working. As a participant in the debate at the time, it was very clear that the government was being forced to subsidize the 4.3-cent rate cap. It was clear in the media and it was clear in discussions that went on in this House that that was not going to be sustainable. But what was interesting is that both the Liberals and the Conservatives voted together to implement the rate cap, even though it was very clear at the time that the government of Ontario was going to have to subsidize that significantly. So I'm always a little bit amused when I hear Liberals now talk about the fact that the reason they broke that promise was because it was just so expensive and the government was going to have to pay so much. We knew that. We knew that at the time the legislation first came forward under the Conservatives. It was very clear when we went into the election that that was going to continue if the Liberals were going to maintain their promise. So it was very clear it was a promise that really they had no intention of keeping.

Secondly, with respect to the premium, when the Conservatives were going through their leadership where Mr. Eves was elected, a number of Conservative leadership candidates were talking about the need for a premium. Mr. McGuinty was interviewed about this at the time. He said very clearly that Liberals would never bring in a premium, that it would force people to pay three times—once through their taxes, once through their pockets for other services, and once through the health care premium itself—and that was something that he would never do. Yet after the election, the Premier was very quick to reverse that. One of the first new taxes that came out, in fact the biggest tax, was this new health tax. I don't think they ever had an intention of keeping that promise either.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I listened very carefully to the comments of my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, but let's hear what real people are saying about things in Ontario today. At the recent economic summit that was held, and I'm reading from a Toronto Star article of October 22: "David Naylor, president of the University of Toronto, who lavished praise on the Premier for pouring money into post-secondary education 'after years of neglect' and for emphasizing research and innovation in his policies."

"And after the speech, McGuinty was thanked by Buzz Hargrove, president of the Canadian Auto Workers ... who complimented the Premier for helping out the auto sector. 'The approach you are taking causes you to stand out,' gushed Hargrove. 'I'm absolutely honoured to thank you today.'

"Business leaders in the audience were also impressed by McGuinty. 'Quite frankly, he scored some points with the audience here,' said Len Crispino, president of the chamber of commerce.

"There is a sense that he is listening and trying to understand the issues that the business community is facing."

It also went on to say, "When Mike Harris was Premier, he never had the variety of connections that

McGuinty has. Harris had ties to the business community, yes, but not to academia. As for labour, forget about it."

When you look at sections of Bill 197, it's about building the foundation for the future. It's about investment in post-secondary education, an historic \$6.2 billion over the next four or five years. It's about education, providing more child care spaces, smaller classes and peace and stability in our school system. In health, it's about more doctors and nurses, shorter wait times and keeping people healthy. It's building a strong economy. When you look at the investments by Toyota and in other key sectors across the province, there is indeed good news; in fact, a measuring stick that's used quite often. The deficit has now been slashed in half through a sound budgeting process and the managerial talent that this government has.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to do with Bill 197, which is the budget bill. He started by talking about the poll that came out today showing that a full 21% of the people polled feel that the Premier is unbelievable, and that certainly is not surprising, I would say, based on the 50 broken promises the member listed that have happened in the last couple years, the most spectacular one, of course, being when the Premier said he wouldn't raise taxes and then brought in this \$900 health tax. We've been counting, and the increase in taxes and fees is now \$2,000 for the average family.

I'd like to talk today, though, about another commitment being broken by this government. I was at a press conference of the Métis Nation of Ontario—Tony Belcourt, the president, and Gary Lipinski, the chair of the negotiating committee—here at Queen's Park this morning. They negotiated an agreement with this government back in July 2004. I've seen lots of letters and the details of the four-point interim harvesting agreement. It's very specific—four points. It's only for those who have a harvester card; it's regulated; it's only in traditional areas. It was an agreement, as they said at the press conference this morning, that the Premier, the Attorney General at the time, Michael Bryant, and the Minister of Natural Resources were all personally involved in making, and now they're not honouring the agreement, so another broken promise, forcing the Métis Nation to come to Queen's Park and hold a press conference and go to court to fight this. I say, who's going to benefit in court? The answer to that is, no one other than the lawyers involved.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I want to dwell for a moment on the issue of truth that the member raised, because it's always an interesting one.

You know, I watched a budget in this—no, it wasn't in this House; it was outside of this House. I watched the coverage on television. It was held at an auto parts plant instead of in the House for the first time in the history of the province of Ontario, contrary to the advice of many sage people in politics. On that occasion, the minister of

the day said Ontario was projected to have a balanced budget. That was the last year of the Conservative government.

Everyone who was planning and putting together platforms and proposals for the future based them on the fact that the previous government was going to have a balanced budget. Lo and behold, when an independent arbitrator, in this case the outgoing Provincial Auditor, looked at the books when the new government assumed office, he found a \$5.6-billion deficit. We now have the interesting situation where Conservatives are saying, "Well, you shouldn't have believed us when we said we had a balanced budget. Foolish people: Didn't you people in opposition say you didn't believe us?" That's their defence. The defence is, "You shouldn't have believed what we said on that occasion." That is the problem that exists when new governments come in. You have a situation where they're basing it on the honesty of the previous government—the honest statements of the previous government—and we find out that the facts are different.

We, as a government, have brought in legislation that will make it mandatory for the Provincial Auditor, before the election, to state what the books of the province are, what the financial situation is. We may have our reward only in heaven for doing that, but I think that is a very positive step in the system of government that won't allow what happened with the previous Conservative government.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, you have two minutes to reply.

1610

Mr. Yakabuski: I hope I see some of those folks in heaven. Anyhow, I would like to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Peterborough, my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka and the government House leader from St. Catharines.

What people are experiencing in this province under this government is one heck of a tough situation: higher taxes—significantly higher taxes—higher electricity rates and health taxes that they were promised they would not be subjected to. And this government does it all under the guise of improving services and going to fix things. We know that in the health care field there have been none of the improvements that they talk about. As a matter of fact, there is a real mess going on with these LHINs and the replacing of the health councils. They talked about giving power to the people, but now they want to reduce the number of CCACs.

It's all about centralizing power in the minister's office. This whole government is all about centralizing power: taking everything you've got, controlling the situation and making all the decisions—the Liberal way. As far as the member from St. Catharines talking about 2003, the people of the province of Ontario have not forgotten the unusual, catastrophic events experienced by this province in the year 2003, something that this government has not had to deal with in any way, shape or form. It's been moving along smoothly for them. Revenues are way up, but what do they do? They squander it.

Rather than invest it in dealing with some of the situations that we have, they just continue to rake more off the taxpayers and not deal with the deficit in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It's a pleasure for me to participate in the debate on Bill 197, the budget bill, this afternoon. I'm going to focus on three issues: firstly, the P3 hospitals; secondly, hospital cuts; and thirdly, autism funding.

Let me begin with the P3 hospitals, which I have a particular interest in of course, because a privately financed hospital has been announced in my own community, a community where construction on phase II of the Sudbury Regional Hospital has now been stalled under the Liberals for as long as it was stalled under the Conservatives. Hopefully, there might be some construction that will actually proceed, finally, in 2006.

But you see, I would like Dalton McGuinty to live up to the election promise that he made with respect to new hospitals and redevelopment of hospitals, the promise that he made before and during the last election, because Mr. McGuinty was very clear that if elected, it was his intention as the leader of the Liberals to publicly finance the construction of new hospitals and the redevelopment of Ontario hospitals. That was his commitment.

It's probably worth putting on the record one more time some of what he said about this very issue. Before the election, on May 28, 2003, the Ottawa Citizen—the reporter was one Rod MacIvor—said the following. This is a quote that he attributes to Dalton McGuinty, and I put quotations around it: "What I take issue with is the mechanism. We believe in public ownership and public financing (of health care)." The article continues. In brackets again—these quotes are attributed to Mr. McGuinty: "Mr. McGuinty warned recently that if the Liberals are elected in the provincial election now expected in the fall, they will stop private sector financing of hospitals, the so-called P3s, which the Conservative government is pushing as the way of the future." Third quote, same article, attributed to Mr. McGuinty in the Ottawa Citizen: "Mr. McGuinty believes that public-private sector partnerships in health care would ultimately cost the province more money than traditional arrangements."

Now, that was before the election. But then during the election, Mr. McGuinty had some more to say about private financing of hospitals. He said this, again to the Ottawa Citizen, Wednesday, September 24, 2003. There were about 10 days to go before the end of the election, so it's right in the middle. Dave Rogers is reporting: "Ontario Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has said the Royal Ottawa Hospital expansion will go ahead because Ottawa needs a new psychiatric hospital, but a Liberal government would cancel the deal with the private consortium because public-private partnerships are a waste of money."

You know what? Dalton McGuinty is absolutely right. I agree with what Mr. McGuinty said before the election and during the election: that public-private partnerships

are a waste of money, and that these partnerships would ultimately cost the province more money than traditional arrangements.

Why is that? Traditionally, in major infrastructure projects like hospitals, colleges, universities and schools, the government goes out and borrows the money from a financial institution for the construction that's going to take place. And because it's the government that goes out and borrows the money, they get the best interest rate on the amount of money that is borrowed. Government always gets the best interest rate on the amount of money that is borrowed. Government has traditionally paid that amount of money off over a 25- to 30-year period. With the changes that have taken place in the reporting of financing in this province, it is very clear that this government would have only had to show on the books the debt that was accumulated in any given year for the amount of money borrowed for a specific project in that year. There would not have been a tremendous addition to the debt of the government, because all that would appear on the province's books is exactly the amount of money that has been borrowed and used for construction purposes in the said fiscal year.

The second reason why it's much more expensive to privately finance this hospital, or these hospitals, is because the private sector is in this game to make some money. That's why they're stepping up to the plate. When government goes and borrows the money, the government is not interested in sticking it to the taxpayers and making a profit off of these huge construction projects. That's not the role of government, nor should it be. So the costs increase when the private sector goes to the market to borrow the money for these construction projects, because the interest rate that the private sector gets to borrow money is higher than the interest rate that the government would ever pay, and secondly, added in to the cost is that profit margin, 15% or 20%, that the private sector consortium is wanting to make off of that project.

That's why Mr. McGuinty was right, before and during the last election, when he said so clearly that these public and private sector financing arrangements cost more money.

Isn't it interesting, though, that after the election he forgot what he said? After the election, with respect to Brampton and with respect to the Royal Ottawa Hospital, Mr. McGuinty moved right along and signed those deals for private sector financing of both of those projects. Do you know that with the case of the Brampton hospital, which has an estimated cost of about \$550 million for that important project, the additional cost to the taxpayers of the province because of private financing is another \$175 million? That's \$175 million more that the taxpayers are going to pay to complete the Brampton hospital because it's privately financed instead of publicly financed. You know what? That's \$175 million that could have been used for front-line patient care, for programs and services to benefit patients in our hospitals, or for programs and services to enhance community ser-

vices, or for new programs and services in health care for the people of Ontario.

The problem is, that's only one project. That's the estimated additional cost to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario: \$175 million for only one project. But this government, through the budget, has gone forward and announced, I suspect, at least a dozen if not 15 other communities that will now have to have their hospital projects privately financed, driving up the costs in those communities too. Imagine how much more the taxpayers of the province are going to pay for each and every one of those privately financed hospitals. Imagine how much we're going to pay as a cumulative total to complete those projects.

1620

These projects should be publicly financed, just like Dalton McGuinty promised in the last election. That was the commitment he made to voters, specifically to voters in his own community. The reason they should be publicly financed is because government gets the best bang for the buck. After all, we're talking about bucks that go back to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario. If we publicly finance these hospitals like we should, like Mr. McGuinty promised, then that's a whole lot more money that would be freed up for programs and services in health care, be they in the hospital system or community-based.

Now, it's interesting that in Sault Ste. Marie, where one of these privately financed schemes has also been announced, one of the outlying municipalities has just sent a letter to the Ministry of Health. I've got a copy of it, dated November 8. It's a resolution that was passed at a regular council meeting with respect to this P3 proposal or, as the Liberals like to call it, alternative financing procurement strategy—the same deal as the Tories, privately financed, just a different name. Here's what council and the mayor agreed to and sent as a resolution to Minister Smitherman:

"Whereas the province of Ontario has announced funding for the new Sault Area Hospital under the alternative financing and procurement strategy; and

"Whereas the alternate financing and procurement strategy is a mechanism where private funds are used for the construction of the new hospital; and

"Whereas the province is expecting a percentage of the funding to be provided by the city of Sault Ste. Marie and surrounding municipalities; and

"Whereas the surrounding municipalities are being asked to provide a \$5-million contribution with no clear formula for calculating individual municipalities' percentages; and

"Whereas the AFP strategy is unclear and our fear is these privately funded hospitals will in fact cost more to construct than publicly funded hospitals; and

"Whereas we believe that health care should be publicly owned and publicly funded; and

"Whereas we are not opposed to the construction of a new hospital in Sault Ste. Marie, only the mechanism in which the government is choosing to build it, which in

the long run will be more expensive and ultimately cost the taxpayers more money; and

"Whereas we refuse to make any contribution of funds to the new hospital fund until we are convinced that the AFP strategy is the best option for the construction of this hospital and that the new hospital, once construction is completed, will be turned over to the public and become a publicly owned and publicly run hospital where our health care should be;

"Therefore be it resolved that the township of Macdonald, Meredith and Aberdeen Additional request the province of Ontario to reconsider the alternative financing and procurement strategy for the new Sault Area Hospital until it is very clear that it is in fact the best option for the construction of the new hospital in Sault Ste. Marie."

I don't think this council is going to get any reassurances from the government that it is the best option, because if you look at the Premier's words before the election, he said it would cost more, and it will. I think the government is making a huge, huge mistake in going down the road of private sector financing in the same way the Conservatives did before, when the Liberals used to criticize that, because it will cost taxpayers more. We will see a draining of money, that should go into health care services in the community and hospitals, actually go to pay for increased additional costs because of the private financing. That's the wrong way to be doing this. We should be funding these hospitals through public financing.

Secondly, the budget also talked about funding and financing for hospitals: operating funding. I raised a question today in this House about Bluewater in Sarnia, because Bluewater in Sarnia is a victim of this government's demand that its deficit be balanced by the end of the fiscal year. Bluewater has about a \$12-million deficit. Bluewater Health has been making some very difficult decisions about cuts, and they have been doing that with the full consent, approval and knowledge of this government right from the get-go. You see, it was this government's demand to balance the budget by the end of fiscal year 2006 that has resulted in the crises that Bluewater is facing. It was this Minister of Health who set in place the seven-point plan, the seven-point process that hospitals were to undertake to balance their budget. It was this minister, this government, that also established a peer review process for Ontario hospitals that were facing specific challenges, and Bluewater is one of them. It was this minister, this government, that actually appointed the peer review leader and had a Ministry of Health representative on the peer review team. It was this government that received the recommendations from the peer review team about the cuts to be made, and this government that approved in writing to the board of Bluewater Health those cuts that have to be undertaken in order for Bluewater to balance its budgets.

Over 100 full-time-equivalent positions are going to be lost as a result of this process, and that's through all forms of health care providers in the hospital system.

Today I raised a specific case about security personnel: 10 of 13 full-time security personnel who are going to lose their jobs as a result of the cuts that this government has said Bluewater has to make. I can tell you that the staff and the administration themselves are very concerned about the cuts to security, because they know that they do need to guarantee to patients, to staff and to visitors to the different sites at Bluewater that they will be secure when they come to the hospital to access programs, to come through the emergency ward, whatever. The front-line staff are saying very clearly that this plan isn't going to work. One site will lose full-time staff—it's the same site where the Alzheimer's unit is located—and those cuts to the security are in addition to the eight or nine orderly staff who are also losing their jobs at the Alzheimer's unit, only they are losing their jobs in January.

The nursing staff have come forward and said they're very concerned for those who work in the methadone clinic, that if something goes wrong in that clinic, they will be physically unable to restrain some of those patients—physically unable to do that. Who's going to look out for the health and safety and the security of those nurses in that unit if something happens? Who's going to look out for the folks in the Alzheimer's unit if an altercation occurs between patients and staff? It's going to be impossible for the hospital to maintain security when they lose 10 of their 13 security personnel. The only response the hospital can bring forward—because the ministry has approved these cuts—is that the hospital is now going to try to train their custodial and maintenance and housekeeping staff, to try and have them respond to code blue circumstances where there's a violent outbreak somewhere in the hospital system. That's unacceptable, from my perspective. Somebody needs to be looking out for the security of the staff and the patients and the visitors at this hospital.

I'm not satisfied with the response I got from the minister today, to somehow indicate that it was Bluewater Health, all on their own, making these terrible cuts. These cuts are being made because this government has said to this hospital and others that they have to balance their budgets by the end of the fiscal year, and it doesn't matter what programs they cut; it doesn't matter what staff are lost; it doesn't matter what security issues are raised as a result. There is going to be a significant problem at Bluewater Health when there is no security to deal with some of these issues. The police locally have already said it's not their job to be at the hospital dealing with security. They'll do what they can in an emergency, but it's not their job. Someone's got to take a serious second look at what's happening in Sarnia at Bluewater to ensure that the health and safety and security of patients, of front-line staff and of visitors is protected at these sites in Sarnia.

The third issue that I want to deal with very briefly has to do, of course, with the promise that Mr. McGuinty made before the election to parents of autistic children, when he said the following on September 17, 2003, to

Nancy Morrison, who at that time had a son, Sean, who was five and who had autism. He said, "I also believe that the lack of government-funded IBI treatment for autistic children over six is unfair and discriminatory. The Ontario Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six. We are not at all confident that the Harris-Eves Conservatives care to devise any innovative solution for autistic children over six—especially those with best outcome possibilities that might potentially be helped within the school system with specially trained EAs." That was the promise that was made during the election campaign to the mother of a five-year-old autistic child.

1630

After the election campaign, the discrimination practised by the Conservatives carried on under the Liberals. This government did nothing—nothing—to end the discrimination against autistic children over the age of six, so that those same kids who turned six and who before would have been cut off under the Conservatives were now being cut off under the Liberals. The government has done absolutely nothing to ensure that funding and special education in our school system are targeted to bring in IBI therapists to the classrooms so that they can continue to work with those children whom they are working with outside of the school system—nothing.

Of all the broken promises, this is absolutely the hardest one for me to bear. I've got to tell you that in working with these families, in seeing the financial struggles that they've had, in seeing the financial ruin that many of them have come close to, this was the worst promise that the government broke, because these are families, many of whom voted for the Liberals on the basis of this promise, that have been let down. And now this government is going to go to court in December and is going to fight these families one more time, because they got a successful ruling. This government is going to spend taxpayers' dollars that should be better used to pay for treatment for these kids, instead fighting these families one more time, despite the election promise that was made, despite the commitment that was made to extend IBI past the age of six and bring it into the school system so that therapists would work with kids there.

I sure hope these families win. But I've got to tell you that I think it's a bloody disgrace that this government would use my money and other taxpayers' dollars to fight these families one more time, especially in view of the promise that Mr. McGuinty made to the mother of an autistic child before the last election. That's just wrong. I wish the government would really reconsider that decision.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It is certainly my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 197, the McGuinty government's second budget.

What I can say to you is how we are evolving in the riding of Huron-Bruce, which I have the honour and privilege to represent. The government's key commitments certainly reflect the concerns and the progress that

we are making in my riding: health care, education, building a strong economy. When we invest in the people of Ontario, which clearly is demonstrated in this bill, we know how prosperous our province will be. We know they are the foundation of our success, the hard-working people of Ontario.

Post-secondary education is the tool that is required to provide the mechanisms for our young people to go forward. When I have the opportunity to go into the classrooms, one of the concerns that I hear is how they will be able to afford to go on. They are positive, they are optimistic, and the future looks bright for them. And in my riding, we have just made an announcement: over 1,500 new jobs in the riding of Huron-Bruce, trade jobs.

I tell the members in attendance that the optimism that is in my riding is so positive. They have a renewed sense of worth, and a direction is in place. They know that the future is bright and the McGuinty government has made that future secure.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I would like to compliment the member from Nickel Belt for her comments on Bill 197. I wanted to just touch on one thing that the member brought to our attention once again in this House. I know we just heard some fancy comments coming from the member for Huron-Bruce on all these jobs and this great atmosphere out there in Huron-Bruce, and I really do hope—

Interjections.

Mr. Dunlop: I bet you they weren't farming jobs, because we know what you've done to the farming community, we know what you've done to the industrial community and we know what you've done to the average family in the province of Ontario, because they are paying about \$2,000 more a year in taxes since you took over.

I'll be looking forward to your comments on Bill 197 when you should stand up in a few minutes and actually tell us what Bill 197 has done, how those 1,500 jobs have impacted that community and where they have actually been created. I'd like to know where they've been created. I'd like you to give us some more details, not the kind of answer we got today from the Attorney General when we asked him where the 400 new cops were and he completely avoided the question altogether.

Back for one second to the member from Nickel Belt: She was completely correct in her comments on autistic children. There has been nothing more cruel in this province ever, as far as I'm concerned, than how Dalton McGuinty promised those families complete treatment for those autistic children, complete IBI treatment, and is now taking them to court. If you can believe it, he's taking the people to court to whom he actually promised treatment. How cruel can it be? How many people have lied to autistic children? How many people do you know in this province who have ever done that?

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like you to use different language than that, please. You'd like to withdraw that, I'm sure.

Mr. Dunlop: I will withdraw that, Mr. Speaker, but I'm going to have a lot more to say on it.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): The Budget Measures Act, 2005, has shown that this government, the McGuinty government, has shown leadership under difficult conditions. We spend \$23 billion more in this province than we get back—that gap, that \$23 billion. Many of the ministries have been flatlined.

But this budget was good news. There's money for education, there's money for health and there's money for economic development. The \$5.6-billion deficit that was left in 2003 from the former government is now down to about half, and that's in year two of this government.

This government is investing in our youth—primary, secondary and post-secondary education. That \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education is going to make a big difference in this province. That's what we heard when we went around this province last year. All the colleges, universities and training institutes were coming to us and saying they didn't have the dollars to do the right job in Ontario and we were last across this country. The investments have been the right investments for Ontario and they're continuing with this budget.

In my own area, Ottawa, we were 14th out of 14 for the longest waiting times in this province. We've got two new MRI machines. We're running the MRI machines a lot longer.

Interjection.

Mr. McNeely: We have. We've gone from the Baird-Harris days to today, when we are offering 52% more MRI exams than just two years ago—52% in just two years. We're showing that the investments this government is making are making a difference in people's lives.

I'd just like to say that the alternative financing and procurement method—it is not correct that this will cost us more money. The risks will be put on the private sector. We will not have these large overruns that we've had in the past.

I think this is an excellent budget.

Mr. Miller: I'd like to make some comments on the speech from the member from Nickel Belt on Bill 197. She started out by talking about what is a very popular item around here, and that is the broken promises of this government.

I didn't have time previously to go through a situation we had today, and that is, we have the Métis Nation of Ontario coming here to Queen's Park and holding a press conference this morning. Why are they here? They're here because this government is not honouring a promise.

To give a little history: On September 19, 2003, the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed that the Metis people existed as an aboriginal people and have existing harvesting rights. So, from that point in 2003, we have the Minister of Natural Resources, with the Premier and the Attorney General, negotiating a four-point agreement that was signed July 7, 2004—very specific, very controlled, to allow for some harvesting in traditional areas for a maximum 1,250 harvester cards respecting seasons for fishing, the spawning periods. It's quite detailed, this four-point agreement. They made that on July 7, 2004,

with the personal involvement of the Premier, the Attorney General and the Minister of Natural Resources. Now what's happening? Well, they're here at Queen's Park holding a press conference because the government is not keeping its promise.

1640

I'll read from the press release today: “The government of Ontario has failed to uphold its clear promise to us that our people would not be charged in exercising their constitutional right to hunt and fish for food in their traditional areas in Ontario, and that is deeply troubling,” said Tony Belcourt, president of the Métis Nation of Ontario.”

Also, Gary Lipinski, who was the negotiator: “At a meeting on October 25 with Premier Dalton McGuinty, Minister Ramsay, Métis Nation of Ontario leaders ... ‘it is important to honour agreements.’ We now call upon the Premier and his government to honour its agreement with the MNO....”

This government seems to continue to have difficulty fulfilling its promises.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Martel: I'd like to thank all the speakers who did reply. Again, I just go back to what Mr. McGuinty said in the Ottawa Citizen right in the middle of the election: “A Liberal government would cancel the deal with the private consortium because public-private partnerships are a waste of money.” I think I outlined clearly how that is in my remarks.

Let me read you an e-mail that I got from Nancy Morrison this weekend. Finally, they got government-funded IBI treatment, but not before their family made a significant investment until Sean was actually accepted.

“We have DFO, direct funding. We receive about \$8,200 every three months, but that's to pay for 20 hours per week of ABA. The supervision is done by a psychologist and a senior therapist and is mandatory. Our costs per month are about \$3,800. We must spend \$11,000 to receive \$8,200. Our funded program still costs us over \$900 a month. After all the debt we incurred waiting for ABA funding, we are still finding it hard to carry the funding. Some families can't afford that, so to speak. We have in total spent in the last three years \$104,000, and less than \$40,000 has been funded. We have carried the burden of the remainder and continue to pay over \$900 a month to continue our funding”—\$104,000, of which only \$40,000 was paid by the government.

I've heard the government say that the reason they're taking these parents to court again is because the court shouldn't decide public policy. Well, do you know what? Justice Kiteley found that the government of Ontario is violating the charter rights of autistic children because it discriminates against these children on the basis of their age and their disability, exactly something that Dalton McGuinty said he was going to end; and secondly, that the Ministry of Education is violating the Education Act by refusing to provide autistic children with the programs

and support they need to learn. Dalton McGuinty promised that the supports and programs autistic children need to learn would be in the school system if he was elected. The court decision follows from promises that this government made and has never kept.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Whitby–Ajax.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm sorry; I should have looked for rotation first. The member for Whitby–Ajax.

Applause.

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby–Ajax): Thank you for the thunderous applause from the member from St. Catharines, who is no doubt applauding because of my intention to leave this place when the federal writ is issued. They love you when you're leaving, don't they?

It is a privilege to speak to the Budget Measures Act, particularly since I've had the opportunity in government to deal with budget issues. I can tell you that this weekend I had the opportunity to speak to people in a new subdivision in the town of Whitby. These are homes that MPAC now says are worth about \$215,000 or so and that people bought for a little bit less than that. What I heard from these people, aged 25, 30, 35, with young children—a lot of toddlers—is that their property taxes are going up, the insurance rates on their house and their car are high, that Mr. McGuinty charged them another \$2,000 per family that they have to pay out of their so-called disposable income, that they're worried about interest rates going up, because they've got mortgages and car loans, and they need at least a car or two to be able to get to work or even get down to the GO station so they can get to work. More and more people are using transit, and that's a good thing, but the reality is that in the GTA a lot of people need to commute from Mississauga to Richmond Hill, Richmond Hill to Whitby and from Whitby and Oshawa into Newmarket, Scarborough and different places that aren't easily or conveniently served by public transit. That's what I'm hearing.

I'm not hearing satisfaction with a government that continually increases spending, when the people who support the government, who pay the taxes to the government, don't have that option. They don't have the choice, at the end of the month, of going to their boss and saying, "I need more money now because my property taxes have gone up and Mr. McGuinty has increased my taxes, when he said he wouldn't, by \$2,000 a year." These are families with two people working, many of them earning \$60,000 and \$70,000 a year—good, middle-class Ontario families, the families that Premier McGuinty, when he was in opposition, used to call working families, when he cared about working families, when he thought it through, about what you're doing to people who are the backbone of Canadian and Ontario society. The burden is inordinate, and it's getting worse and worse.

This winter is going to be a difficult winter for people in Whitby and Oshawa and Ajax and all across the province of Ontario as these home heating bills come in,

no matter how you heat: if you heat with electricity, if you heat with natural gas, or fuel oil, whatever. And then, of course, there is putting gasoline in the cars. This government is out of touch when it comes to budgeting and the problem comes—and I remember well preparing budgets in the province of Ontario. You have to control spending, just like the people of the province of Ontario have to control their own spending. They do a pretty good job at it and they work hard at it, but they're working half the year for the government: the government of Ontario, the government of Canada, their municipal government. And it's getting worse. Instead of the burden being lightened by government, this government gets elected by saying, "We won't increase the burden. We won't put more weight on the shoulders of the hard-working people of the province of Ontario." It gets elected and then flips right around and says, "Oh, yeah, not only will we; it's going to be big-time," and it looks like it's permanent. It will be permanent, because they don't know how to control spending.

Spending in this province, in round numbers, from 2001 to now, in four years from when I did the budget to when they've done the budget, has gone up about \$20 billion, from \$65 billion to \$85 billion—a staggering increase in spending. The federal government has gone the same way with these deals they made with the NDP in the spring. Federal spending is up around \$200 billion. But Canadians are fair-minded if there is value for money: if we can sit in our homes in Durham region or anywhere else in the 905 or the 416 or other parts and we can say, "Boy, our hospital is running a lot better now"; "Boy, we have a lot more family doctors in the province of Ontario now, so that we can all get access to a family physician"; "Boy, our criminal justice system in Ontario really works well with those young offenders, with those 14- and 15-year-olds with guns, loaded firearms in our communities"; "Oh, our infrastructure is much better; you know, that 407 has been extended through Durham region"; "Our Durham region courthouse, that we've been waiting for for years; is being built." None of that is happening, of course. So what people are saying is, "Why are we paying these high taxes when we actually see our services deteriorating?" The Premier's answer will be, "Well, you're going to have more MRIs." More MRIs? We already had more MRIs. Yes, they were publicly funded in our universal public health care system, but yes, some of them were operated privately, just like the Shouldice Hospital for hernias, just like the Homewood hospital in Guelph, which helps many people with addictions—it has been there for years and years and years. But this ideological problem that the Premier has, and that I guess other members opposite have, that you cannot have a publicly funded health service delivered privately—despite what's happening in Quebec, despite what's happening in Alberta, we're going to punish the people of Ontario because of our hare-brained ideology, our mistaken ideology. Not only will service get worse, but we're also going to charge them more for the service. What a deal for the taxpayers

of the province of Ontario. That's what's wrong, fundamentally, with the budget process that we're witnessing here in this bill and in the budget that has been brought forward.

If you don't know where you're going, it's easy to get lost along the way. Thank goodness this government has less than two years of life left in it, because the spending, by the time they leave, will probably be \$90 billion or \$95 billion. Is the Ontario economy that strong? My goodness, it's going to grow at 5% and 6% over the next couple of years, so these guys can keep increasing spending 5%, 6%, 7%, 8%, unsustainable spending increases in health care and education? Is the Ontario economy growing like that? Nope. Their own predictions have the Ontario economy at around 3%, 3.2%, 2.9% going forward, and they overpredicted last year.

1650

The private sector forecasters are being increasingly cautious in their predictions, for lots of reasons, with respect to the Ontario economy. One of them is productivity. What is this government doing to increase productivity? Increasing taxes—just the wrong thing to do. If we want to be a more competitive jurisdiction, if we want to hold our place as a prosperous place in the world, just what we shouldn't do is increase the tax burden on individuals and businesses, but that's exactly what we're doing. All those entrepreneurial people—I was privileged to be the economic development minister for a while—if you study it, you know. I know the member for St. Catharines, and other people who have studied it, know that the backbone of our business, of our employment in the province of Ontario, isn't the big guys. General Motors actually doesn't grow much in terms of employing people. But the people in our communities whom members here know, who start their own businesses, who mortgage their homes to start their own businesses, who start perhaps just with the husband and wife in the business or a couple of other partners or one of their kids or whatever, and grow it into five people and seven people and 10 people: That's the backbone of the Ontario economy. That's where the growth is: the people who take the risk. Why would they take that kind of risk when their reward at the end of the year is, "McGuinty is going to take another \$2,000 from you"?

Where is the impetus for people who are working at hourly rated jobs to work overtime when their marginal tax rates when they work overtime are way up here? Where's the encouragement to people in Ontario to aspire to work harder, to do better for their families when you keep increasing the burden on them? It makes no sense. Then the government says, through the Minister of Economic Development, "We want more productivity." Well, if you want more productivity, to encourage people to work, how do you encourage people to work and take risks? You reduce the burden on them, that huge tax burden that is put upon them in the province of Ontario. So that's important. The productivity issue is vitally important.

The government has dropped the ball on the energy issue, which is a very serious matter. We have businesses

now making decisions for the future, deciding not to expand in the province of Ontario, deciding to locate their business elsewhere, and we're not just talking about competing with Americans here; we're also competing within the great country of Canada. We're competing with Alberta and British Columbia, which are prosperous places. They're reducing their tax burdens, they're running surpluses, they're controlling their spending: the fundamental rules that don't come from some fancy book at some fancy university; it comes from what parents have to do in their own homes at the dining room tables and the kitchen tables of Ontario, when they have to sit down and figure out what they can afford for the year. And surely people are entitled to ask for the same fundamental discipline from the people they elect: that they would, at the very least, sit down at their cabinet table and do a little figuring about what is affordable and what isn't, and plan ahead and get their priorities right.

If we don't get the productivity issue right in this province, if we don't get the energy issue right, this government will have left a legacy to the people of Ontario that will be remembered vividly, sharply and very negatively five and 10 years from now, because that's when the loss of manufacturing jobs that we're already seeing in the province of Ontario will accelerate. We'll look back at this time as the time of lost opportunity, when the government of the day, the Liberal government of the day led by Mr. McGuinty, chose to let spending get out of control, and their way of dealing with their uncontrolled spending was to increase taxes, and let the energy issue get out of control so that businesses decided not to locate here and not to expand here. Those are fundamental issues in which the government has dropped the ball.

The government is doing one thing right, and they should get credit for it. Despite the fact they campaigned against public-private partnerships and said they would not do any in the province of Ontario, I congratulate the government on abandoning that promise. I promise that I will not criticize them for that. I think it's a good idea. They've wasted two years and two months or so dithering and trying to go, "What are we going to do? This public-private partnership is actually the only way we can build the infrastructure we need in the province of Ontario on a timely basis, but we don't want to do that because it's a Conservative idea." It was Margaret Thatcher's idea 20 years ago. It's been done in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and other places successfully. It was done through the SuperBuild corporation in the province of Ontario successfully under the Progressive Conservative government here. It took them two years and a couple of months to say, "You know, actually, we have to do this." But congratulations: It's the right thing to do. Now get on with it.

You've recreated the SuperBuild corporation; you're calling it something else. That's fine. You've recreated public-private partnerships; you're calling it something else. That's a mistake, actually, since there's international understanding of the term "public-private part-

nerships.” There are lots of precedents and contracts and legal and business understanding around the world of what that term means so it’s actually a mistake for the government to call it something else, but I’m hopeful that it will be communicated well enough that people will realize what it is.

I also hope that on public-private partnerships, the government of Ontario of the day will not be so unwise as to put out too many projects at once, because that will create an undersupply of bidders in the marketplace. They have to be careful about that in terms of looking at the world marketplace for infrastructure capital available for public-private partnerships—not just here but around the world—and make sure that they prioritize what they do, that they get the most important projects out there early and on a timely basis, not competing at the same time with other large projects demanding capital and private partners. That’ll help control the costs as well. This is a sophisticated endeavour. Once you get into public-private partnerships, I hope that the government will be careful and be mindful of those fundamental cautions.

I hear again about social services, and I regret this. I hear it in my own community from our children’s treatment centre. I recall, as the Minister of Finance in 2001, that when the children’s treatment centres came in to see us in the pre-budget consultations, they needed an extra \$20 million that year. That’s what they asked for; that was to catch up. That was all 19 children’s treatment centres in the province of Ontario. In that budget, we provided that funding for the children’s treatment centres.

It has slipped again. I know that Minister Bountrogianni, when she was responsible for this issue, was conscious of this, and I know that she was very well-intentioned on this issue, but I encourage the government that when you’re spending all this big money on big-budget things, don’t forget those parts of our social fabric, our social services, that actually work and have proven themselves. When we’re talking about children with disabilities and babies born with disabilities, we should ensure that the children’s treatment centres are fully funded, because six months in the life of a baby with disabilities is six years or 60 years in the lives of other people. That’s fundamentally important, that we are aware of those aspects of our social services that are clearly effective and make a difference in the long run for babies and for our economy, because we can help people contribute and use their abilities in our society to their fullest.

The MaRS project has gone ahead—medical and related sciences. That was something our government funded and made the capital decision about. It was opened recently by the Premier. I was pleased to be there; it’s a brilliant idea. It’s good that the government is continuing it; they need to do it. If Canada and Ontario are going to be prosperous going forward—that means a standard of living that we’re accustomed to, and hopefully better each generation, and a quality of life that

we hope for our children and our grandchildren—then we have to be smarter. We’re not going to be able to build \$10,000 automobiles in the province of Ontario, and we don’t want to. We don’t want to ask people who build automobiles to work for low wages, as is done in China and in other jurisdictions. What we want to do is be smarter and do more of the design and engineering and technological work. That’s fundamental to economic growth. It’s fundamental to the ultimate success of the auto sector, which is a huge sector of the Ontario economy. It is fundamental to the plastic sector. It is fundamental to our manufacturing sector in Ontario. So we need to invest in skills training.

1700

I will give you a very practical example. Durham College has a skills training centre at Thickson Road and Highway 401. It’s on Champlain Boulevard in Whitby. It’s the old Cadbury plant. Some people will remember that, driving along the 401, right there. It’s full. I just went through the skills training centre again in the last couple of weeks. There are students clamouring to get in. This is true in other places in the province too. This is great news, that students and their families have recognized that in the skilled trades you’re likely to end up earning more money than your supervisor, that these are great jobs. Well, it’s there; it works. I hope that when the government is analyzing needs and where it’s going to spend money, like spending it on children’s treatment centres, will spend it on the successful community colleges that have invested in skilled trades. You don’t need to reinvent the wheel, but you need to provide sustainable expansion funding for those things that actually work to make a difference in the province of Ontario. So I commend those initiatives as well.

On infrastructure, this is a crisis situation in Ontario. As I’ve said, the government has dithered for more than two years on this. We have to expand the GO train system. We have to permit the GO buses to have some priority. There is a ridiculous situation that I see regularly, where GO buses are stuck in traffic, whether it’s on the Don Valley Parkway, on the 401, on the 427—wherever. It doesn’t make sense that the government on one hand says, “We want people to take public transit,” and on the other hand makes it inconvenient to do so and of little advantage in some situations, where you get a public transit vehicle stuck in traffic with vehicles with single occupants in them. This is just fundamental planning that we need to have in the province if we’re going to grow our economy.

We need skills training. We need to take care of those persons with disabilities. We need to help them early in life to emphasize their abilities. We need to reduce the tax burden on the entrepreneurial people of Ontario and on small businesses in the province, so they can grow and invest and say, “I want to stay in Ontario. I have a great future in Ontario. I want my family to stay in Ontario. Our standard of living is going to be higher generation to generation, and we’re going to have a high quality of

life." We need to see progress in the infrastructure area, and it needs to be done quickly.

If I may say this finally, having talked about some of the substantive issues relating to budgeting, we need to improve our processes. This province is process crazy, when you do an environmental assessment that takes three and four and five years to build a highway. We need environmental assessments, but for goodness' sake, they can sit on weekends, they can sit at night, they can expedite it. Government is supposed to serve the people, not the stakeholders—I don't even like that term—but governments get captive of these stakeholders. Think about the people being served. They don't have four or five or six years to wait for more GO trains, more highways and better infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I listened carefully to the contribution to this debate by the member for Whitby–Ajax. We are certainly going to miss him.

Mr. Flaherty: How much?

Mr. Kormos: We're going to miss him a whole lot, once that federal election is called and when Mr. Flaherty begins running in his riding federally. If I weren't a New Democrat, I'd be encouraging people to vote for Mr. Flaherty. But I can say this: In this riding, there are really only two choices. My first choice, my druthers, is for folks to vote for the NDP candidate, but if you're not going to vote for the NDP candidate, you might as well vote for Mr. Flaherty, otherwise all you're going to be doing is encouraging the bad behaviour of Liberals in Ottawa. It would be just incredible—because people have choices. If they have a right-wing perspective—and Lord knows, there are a few of those folks around—they should vote Tory. If they're progressive people, if they believe in public health care, publicly funded education and social justice, they should vote for New Democrats.

I look forward to this federal election, because I think the choices are oh, so simple. Clearly, people don't want to re-elect the Liberals, so that makes it a choice of one or the other. I'm voting for a New Democrat down where I come from. I want New Democrats to vote for New Democrats where they come from. But for the life of me, I can't see them voting for the Liberals. Can you, Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I almost don't know how to follow that last one. I never thought I'd hear the member for, as we used to say, Welland–Thorold, and now Niagara Centre, recommending that people vote for a right-wing Conservative. But something new happens all the time. I'll give him his credit.

There's a great dilemma for Mr. Flaherty, because here's what happens. Every day in the House, his leader and other members in the caucus get up and ask the government to spend more money. They want to spend more money on hospitals. They say we're not spending enough on agriculture. They want us to spend money, as we should, on autistic children. They want us to build more roads and expand public transit. They want us to

spend money on water treatment, because of course the situation was brought to light about the very difficult circumstances that the aboriginal people in Ontario were facing, and the opposition want us to spend money there.

The member says the children's treatment centres, and I think they're great and we should be spending money there. They want more money for courts, more money for the police, more money for new arenas and more money for courthouses. They want to keep the hospitals open for the developmentally disabled, and I understand that as well. They want more money to go to municipalities to assist. They don't object to the post-secondary education investment that this government has made, which is unprecedented. There's a substantial investment in public education being made. Of course, to speed up the environmental assessment it would be required to invest more money.

So the dilemma, it seems to me, for my friend from Whitby is that his leader, John Tory, who emerged victorious in the contest—though some days I wonder if his philosophy actually won, but I know he emerged victorious—is at odds with him. So I can understand why he wants to move to a new venue with a new leader whose views are probably closest to his. I wish him well personally, if not in the election.

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I want to underscore the very strong points that have been made by my colleague from Whitby–Ajax, who had a distinguished record as the Treasurer for this province and who brings to the House a lot of depth, analysis and participation in this debate.

I listened intently to the member from St. Catharines, and I want to give him a couple of quick examples of what my colleague from Whitby was talking about.

Just taking the issue of cancer treatment and the fact that we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars for treatments outside of Ontario that could be done at less cost in our own province, this was something that our government understood with the repatriating of brain-injured residents. I remember raising it in this House with Elinor Caplan, who said, "No, no, no," and we spent all this money in the United States for private clinics. But it took a Conservative government to bring in the program here. Not only are we doing it more cost-effectively, but we're also reaching more Ontario residents.

The same with cancer treatments: If we start those cancer treatments here in Ontario when the drugs are available, it would be less costly. But the problem with the Liberal government is, nowhere in their budget are they expressing any real understanding of these opportunities to provide more effective programming at less cost.

Last week, we opened a program for anorexia in our community. I found out that today in Ontario we're spending upwards of \$80,000 to send young women from this province to Arizona. Will we come up with money to provide the program here in Ontario? No. Will we trust our hospitals to develop good programs? No, we won't. Why? Because it's easier to spend more money and ship

Ontarians to the United States than to roll up your sleeves and find efficiencies in Ontario's health system, as we could in a budget certainly different from the one we have today.

1710

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It certainly is a pleasure to have a couple of minutes to speak and to respond to the comments from the member from Whitby–Ajax.

As I listened to the debate this afternoon and many of the members of the opposition speaking, it seems like doom and gloom from this bill and this budget. But I can tell you, speaking from experience back in my riding, I have carried for a couple of weeks now, hoping to get an opportunity to speak and to have a reply, a postcard from a young fellow from my riding who, through some obstacles in his getting to university, approached my office and had help from our government. He writes, "I am up at Carleton now, studying aerospace engineering. I didn't think I would be able to get here, but I did. Thanks to your help. We are all grateful." I know his parents are grateful, but when he says, "Thanks to your help," he means thanks to the help of the government that I am honoured and proud to serve. We know what we have in this budget to serve the young people of this province and the young people of my riding whom I have had many opportunities to serve in the past as an educator. That's why I think it's not all doom and gloom.

I'll move on to my local hospital just a couple of weeks ago in unveiling a new CT scanner at the Cornwall Community Hospital at a cost of \$1.4 million to replace an aged CT scanner that really wasn't functioning very well. But to have reported that we've had a 30% increase in the output, that's speaking to what we are going to do with this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Whitby–Ajax has two minutes to reply.

Applause.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you. Another resounding ovation from the member for St. Catharines. I appreciate that. It's the first time ever that that has occurred in his many years here, and my many years here as well.

I thank the member from Niagara Centre for the endorsement. I only regret that Sid Ryan won't run in Whitby. You know, Sid lives in Whitby, and Sid's OK.

Mr. Kormos: —a side location?

Mr. Flaherty: I'll ask Sid for a side. Maybe if I use your quote, the member for Niagara Centre, I'll get a side out of Sid. But if Sid runs in Oshawa—he wants to run in Oshawa, and I think he's going to run again over in Oshawa in the federal election, so we'll see how that turns out for Sid Ryan.

I thank the government House leader for his remarks, which fell short of a full endorsement, but they were personally kind, in any event.

I hold those members in some affection, of course—less affection than members like Mr. Sterling here, who's been a long-term Progressive Conservative member of the Legislature.

Mr. Yakabuski: He's older than dirt.

Mr. Flaherty: "Older than dirt," according to the member from the Ottawa Valley.

I'm not pessimistic. The member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh says we're pessimistic, that we're doom and gloom. We're not at all. I think what Canadians and people in Ontario are saying is, we can do better than this. We can have a better criminal justice system. We can have a better young offenders system. We can properly fund our children's treatment centres. Mrs. Bountrogianni is here, and she knows this subject well and is empathetic to it.

We can do better in our health care system, but we've got to get away from this ideological thing that I mentioned earlier about closing MRIs because they're being run privately but funded publicly. We've got to get away from that because Ontario is in danger of squandering the opportunity that it has to be one of the wealthiest, most prosperous, best places in the world to live and to raise a family. Those are some of the fundamentals that we have to get right, and this government is not getting that right by increasing the tax burden on working families in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Kormos: I'm pleased and proud to join in this debate on behalf of the New Democratic Party caucus here at Queen's Park.

In addressing the issue of this government's budget, I feel compelled to refer to events of Saturday past. I'd been to the Watsons' 50th wedding anniversary over at the Croatian Hall, and later on in the evening was at the Casa Dante hall for their Italian night. But at 2 in the afternoon, I was over at a very special event at the Ukrainian Labour Temple on Ontario Road. The Ukrainian Labour Temple not only has a noble and honourable position in the history of Crowland and the city of Welland, but it's been a part of my life and my background for so many years. When I was a young person, the Ukrainian Labour Temple was to me what the Mine Mill Hall in Sudbury was to Jim Bradley. I was at the Ukrainian Labour Temple on Ontario Road because it was finally being acknowledged by LACAC as an historic site, as a heritage site. The hall, if you've ever been there, has some great significance, because it is the first Ukrainian Labour Temple in this part of the country. It was first built back in 1917 on Sixth Street and then moved to Ontario Road.

These folks, these people, these Eastern Europeans, many of whom had no education in their own language, never mind in the language of their new country of Canada, all of whom obviously spoke only their mother tongue when they came to this country—there were no settlement programs for them, no English-as-a-second-language course. The hall was full. That small Ukrainian Labour Temple was standing room only. I think I can safely say that I knew every single person in that room. I grew up with them. They were my parents' and grandparents' generation, but as a kid I had been welcomed in that hall, welcomed in their homes.

I'm grateful, of course, to Marnie Swayze, one of that team of LACAC members that worked hard to ensure that the labour temple was declared a heritage site and was appropriately plaqued.

I was grateful for the commentary of Ron Boyer, for instance, an old, long-time friend, a good trade unionist, and a retired worker.

I'm grateful that Nick Petrachenko was there. Nick's getting on in years. Nick was there with two of his sons sitting in the front row. Nick doesn't move as fast as he used to, by any stretch of the imagination, but heck, Nick's been around a long time.

People like Mike Bosnich, who spoke: Mike was a UE, a united electrical workers' business agent, elected in that position in 1947 after he came back from four-and-a-half years serving overseas. He pointed out the modest row of medals on his chest. Mike Bosnich served in the army during the course of the liberation of Belgium and Holland, amongst others. Mike Bosnich spoke about how he, like so many other young immigrants or children of immigrants, went to Europe to fight that war as Canadians, but they came back and fought another war. They fought the battle against poverty. They fought the battle against exploitative and abusive bosses. They fought the battle for social justice. They built trade unions. They fought for good contracts, they fought for pensions, and they fought for safer working conditions and better wages.

But as I greeted people in that Ukrainian Labour Temple hall and reflected on how I had known them when they were young and strong and virile and their gait wasn't in any way stiff, nor were their backs stooped. They were the hardest-working people you could ever find. And if you go along those streets in that part of Welland, in old Crowland, where the Ukrainian Labour Temple stands: street and avenue after street and avenue of homes built by hand by these same immigrants. I, for the life of me, don't know how—look, I've been to the places in Europe where these people came from, where my own family came from as well. They didn't have two-by-four construction in those little villages; they didn't have asphalt shingles. For the life of me, I don't know how these people came from those places in Europe and, without literacy skills, without Bob Vila videotapes, knew how to build two-by-four frame construction—and build them good, because they're still standing.

Let me say this: Those wonderful people, those great people, people like Clara Babiy and her family and her folks—I know her folks well—these people worked hard all of their lives, they sacrificed, they did without, they saved; many of them never got to elementary school, never mind high school.

1720

I talked to one woman. She was reflecting on the fact—as a matter of fact, I talked to her because she told me that her audiologist said she should get into our office to talk about workers' comp, her WSIB claim, because she has lost most of her hearing. She worked in the Wabasso cotton mill. She started working when she was

13. Because you see, when she was 13, the choice she had to make wasn't which high school she was going to go to—was she going to go to the Catholic school or the public school. Her choice was, which knitting mill are you going to go work in? But I'll tell you this: Her kids all have college and university degrees, and they're enjoying, of course, a level of affluence that their grandparents never dared dream of and their parents wished only for their children and not for themselves.

I talk about these people because I want to tell you what these people's fears are in the year 2005, after lifetimes of hard work and sacrifice and contribution to their communities, selflessness. I'm talking in the year 2005 to folks who are fearful about not being able to continue to live in their own homes, the homes that they've paid for at least once, sometimes twice, if they financed kids' college and university educations. It's straightforward: the burdens of ever-rising property taxes, increasing electricity costs, fuel—natural gas prices. You, like I, know you can't tell old folks to turn the thermometer down another few degrees to save a few dollars. When you're in your 80s-plus—

Mr. Yakabuski: It's cold.

Mr. Kormos: It's cold. You've been in either your folks' home or some of your constituents' homes and the heat is cranked up and you're just sweltering, and they're putting on another sweater and they're asking you if you're OK, if you don't find it too cold. Isn't it a tragedy that folks who have worked hard all of their lives, who have sacrificed so much, who have been given so little, have to in their most senior years now confront the fear of literal homelessness—not because some catastrophe has destroyed their home; no hurricane, no flood, no tornado, but because Ontario in the year 2005 is simply not very hospitable to a whole lot of its residents, to a whole lot of its citizens.

I listened to and have listened to, and I suspect I'll continue listening to, the government's spin around its budget. But the question that has to be posed is as simple as this: Is life better for these people now or was it better 10 years ago; has life gotten better or has it gotten worse; have things gotten easier or have they gotten tougher?

I drive the QEW like others drive their respective highways to their own homes. I'm not talking about the guys and gals in the Mercedes-Benz S500s. I'm talking about hard-working folks who have lived lifetimes walking with that black lunch bucket to and from Union Carbide, old Electro Metals—it's not there any more—to and from Atlas Steel—it's not there any more; gone under Dalton McGuinty's Ontario—to and from—

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: Listen, I've given this speech more than once, Mr. Flaherty—armies of workers walking to and from any number of drop forges, but not any more because they're not there any more; armies of workers walking to and from knitting and textile mills, except they're not there any more.

The largest single employer in the city of Welland, a long-time steel town, is a call centre. Believe me, I don't

begrudge those jobs. I don't begrudge them for a minute, because when you're desperate for work, like so many folks are in so many parts of this province, you take any job you can; that's the whole point. But, you see, call centres—and again, I have the highest regard for people who work in those places because that's hard work, too. You sit there and a computer is feeding you calls, another computer is monitoring you and Big Brother is watching you, and you've got to work. It's not easy work; it's hard.

Forgive me for such a Luddite position, but I have a dial-up service provider on my home computer, and from time to time there's a problem with the connection, so I call the 1-800 number. In times gone by, I'd call the 1-800 number and the call centre was somewhere in the southern United States, either Oklahoma or Texas, and I'd describe the problem. These are these young—I presume they're young people; they've got to be young people because nobody else would be that smart and brainy and whizzy around computers. By the time you got through the problem and got it fixed, it would be, "How's the weather in Canada today?" I'd say, "Fine. How's it down there? Where am I calling?" and they'd say, "Texas," or wherever.

But the last time I called that same 1-800 number—it's a call centre that does the service work for this ISP, I suppose is what they're called—to report a problem with the dial-up, I talked to a person who again was as whizzy around computers as you could want, but who said, "What's the weather like in Canada right now?" I told them, "It's quite nice; it's fall." I said, "Where am I calling?" and he said, "Have you ever been to the Philippines?" You see, those call centres in so many communities that have been deindustrialized have the capacity to move across the world a thousand times faster than any industrial site ever did.

Mr. Yakabuski: Almost as fast as a broken Liberal promise.

Mr. Kormos: It's like that; it's like a snap. So it causes me some great concern when communities like mine have become increasingly reliant upon call centres as sources of employment and I learn both anecdotally, as I've explained, as well as by what you read that that call centre in your town could be in India next month, or the Philippines or China. It was remarkable that Dalton McGuinty had to travel halfway around the world to realize and acknowledge that we've lost 42,000 to 45,000 industrial, high-wage, value-added manufacturing jobs here in the province of Ontario, and to acknowledge that it wasn't a very nice thing to happen.

It was remarkable. I read the press report. Poor Richard Brennan, following the Premier, finally gets him to acknowledge that, yes, we've lost 40,000 to 45,000 industrial, value-added manufacturing jobs. Those are wealth-creation jobs. When I listen to this Minister of Economic Development in his expensive suit stand up—

Interjection.

1730

Mr. Kormos: I hear heckling from the member for Huron-Bruce. I presume, then, that she knows that

they're cheap suits. Look, when I see the Minister of Economic Development stand up in his expensive suit—although the member for Huron-Bruce insists they are cheap ones.

Mrs. Mitchell: No, I did not.

Mr. Kormos: I saw the receipt. It was filed. It was with his riding association's filing. Trust me. If it was a cheap suit, he would have bought it himself, right?

Mr. Flaherty: I don't think he got it at Moore's.

Mr. Kormos: That's right, or Studio 267. Remember Studio 267 down on Yonge Street? I used to love that place. I don't know where they went. They moved. It used to be 267 Yonge Street. It was incredible. Three pairs of pants, two jackets: 50 bucks. If you wanted new ones, you had to pay more, but I never saw any reason.

But any time I hear the Minister of Economic Development in his expensive suit stand up and say, "We've created thousands of new jobs in Ontario; indeed, in the hotel industry alone"—go talk to some of those people working in the hotel industry, those women on their hands and knees scrubbing other people's filth from toilets and bathtubs for minimum wage. Do you want to know something? You don't send kids to college and university on what you make as a cleaning person in a hotel.

The Premier has got to understand that we have a job crisis here in the province of Ontario. It's a job crisis that not only impacts those young people who are finishing their schooling and going out there looking for ways to meaningfully participate in the economy, but it's a job crisis that also clearly has had an impact on their grandparents, folks like the good people at the Ukrainian Labour Temple on Saturday. Those chairs have been used by those people for Lord knows how many decades. You could smell the cabbage cooking in the basement. It was wafting up through the oak floorboards, because that's just the way it was. That's what they were doing while others were—and how many speeches did I listen to in that labour temple hall, with the smell of cabbage cooking coming up through the basement? Those people are worried about themselves, as 70- and 80- and 90-year-old Ontarians, and they're even more worried about their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren, who find themselves without the high-wage jobs that have sustained a strong economy that has paid for public education and public health care. It has paid for roads and the sort of things we need to keep our communities safe.

This government has abandoned that economy. This government has abandoned high-wage jobs. This government has abandoned those senior citizens. This government has abandoned their grandchildren. This budget doesn't address that abandonment.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'd like to respond to the comments of the member from Niagara Centre. First, with respect to the issue of jobs, because I live in a town, Guelph, where the primary employer is the auto parts sector: I need to tell you that the folks in

my town are absolutely delighted that our government has invested in the auto industry, because in investing in the auto industry—in auto parts, auto manufacturing and auto assembly—we are in fact investing in good, value-added industrial manufacturing jobs that my friend from Niagara Centre has just described. That is one of the outcomes of this government's financial plan. The people in my town are very grateful for that.

I also thought I might do something rather novel, which is to talk about what's actually in the bill, because there are a number of items in the budget bill that are not immediately apparent. One of them is the inclusion of Ontario's universities in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This has never happened before. I need to tell you that my university, the University of Guelph, has been quite supportive of the inclusion of universities in the freedom of information act. We will obviously make sure that proprietary research is protected and that things like exam questions are protected and not subject to freedom of information, but generally we have good support from my university on this. We're also going to deal with private career colleges and bring some accountability to that sector, where things have been sadly lacking.

I think that for my community, this budget is very good news.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Niagara Centre. It was quite an interesting story, but nonetheless a somewhat alarming story. This is what people in this province are sensing and feeling now under this government: all that effort and blood and sweat and toil that they have contributed to this province and this economy over those many decades—they're now asking themselves, what for? So that this government can pile and pile on us, for their political purposes and their reasons, unbeknownst to the woman who went to that textile plant or that man who carried that lunch pail to Atlas Steel—again, as you say, gone. Many people from my riding were employed at Atlas Steel over the years, and came down to this area because this is where the jobs were. But are the jobs, the great and good industrial jobs, there in Welland and Hamilton any more? This government is killing them with their taxation policies, their energy policies.

On top of that, the average family is being hit with over \$2,000 in fees and taxes as a result of this government's political policies. So that the family the member was talking about—I certainly can empathize with what they're experiencing and what they feel about the future of this province. What they're wondering is, is this going to present the opportunities for our grandchildren down the road, under current government policies? They're asking that, and answering it themselves: No.

Mr. Jackson: I want to commend the member from Niagara Centre. I've listened to him raise important issues over many years, and today is no exception. I must say, though, as someone who shares Ukrainian ancestry with several members of this Legislature, that I have

visited the hall in Welland. It's a magnificent place, and I concur that the cooking that goes on there is extraordinary. I too will be attending St. Mary's Ukrainian hall bazaar this Saturday from 10 o'clock until 2 o'clock, and I will be getting my share of golubtsi and perogy, and all those wonderful things my grandmother taught me how to make and that I never have time to make, but I certainly eat them.

Also, the last time I was at the church hall—just last week, as a matter of fact—many of the seniors came up to me and expressed similar concerns: that they have seen nothing in the last two years that would clearly demonstrate that the government understands the fiscal plight that seniors face in this province, such as the delisting of certain of their health services which this government did. For the first time in Ontario's history, this government is now charging an OHIP premium to persons over the age of 65. In fact, this government is charging an OHIP premium—or a health tax, rather—to persons in nursing homes for the first time in Ontario. To my knowledge, I don't think any other province does this.

1740

There was the attack on seniors and their ability to remain independently in their homes when this government retroactively cancelled the education property tax credit brought in by the previous government that would have provided financial relief for tenants and for seniors who are house rich and income poor and are having a hard time coping.

Nothing in this budget seems to address those needs for seniors.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I'm pleased to speak just for a moment or two on my support for this budget. It really offers a contrast between what the previous government's priorities were for the community and what our priorities are. I can speak as a representative from Ottawa West–Nepean of those contrasts. The previous government closed Riverside Hospital. They closed the Grace hospital. They tried to close the CHEO cardiac unit. They tried to close Montfort.

Today, two years later, we are in the process of doubling the size of Montfort. We've given a 21.5% increase to the Queensway Carleton Hospital's operating budget—its largest increase ever. We've saved the CHEO cardiac unit. In fact, just last week our health minister was announcing that the natal screening clinic is going to be located at CHEO.

Quite frankly, I think we've turned the ship around in this budget when it comes to health care as a result of the investments we're making. What worries me and what worries my constituents—I happen to have the largest number of senior citizens per capita of any riding in eastern Ontario, and I've been to lots of bazaars and bake sales. I was at 10 of them last weekend. People say I'm a little bizarre going to these bazaars, but they're great to keep in touch with people and support local charities and churches and synagogues. The fact of the matter is, people are worried about John Tory's plan to gut \$2.4 billion out of the health care budget. What does that

mean? Does that mean they're going back to the old Tory ways of closing the hospital? Are they going to close the Queensway Carleton Hospital? That \$2.4 billion represents the closure of approximately 11 community hospitals.

The people of Ottawa West–Nepean and eastern Ontario were not happy with the previous government and the slash-and-burn approach to health care. I'm proud of what our government has done to improve the health care of our seniors and all citizens in our community.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Kormos: I appreciate the minister of fitness introducing that particular issue because, look, where I come from, and I suspect it's the same across the province of Ontario, if you don't have family attending to you in the hospital, in the extended care or long-term-care facility, if you've got Alzheimer's and you don't have family to assist the staff of that institution in caring for you, you are in deep, deep trouble. I, like so many other people, have been to places in the world—impoverished places, Third World places—where families camp out in the hospital room or out beside the hospital room to make sure that their family member is fed, that their family member has dressings changed, that their family member has the basic needs that they require. The nurses I know and I see in hospitals across Niagara are run ragged, let me tell you—run ragged. They're doing double and triple duty, but like so many Third World countries, families are in those hospital rooms tending to their family members. If you've got a family member with Alzheimer's who needs institutional care, you'd better hope that that person has kids or a spouse or in-laws or somebody living close enough by that they can attend to help them with daily needs.

People don't have physicians, and it's not just about supply; it's about retention. This government has persisted in creating a doctor-hostile environment in this province. We can graduate all the new doctors you want, but if you maintain the Dalton McGuinty, never mind George Smitherman—who's going to be a “terrorist” next? Obstetricians? Pediatricians? George Smitherman attacks optometrists, who are trying to engage in a very legitimate debate about the need to have optometry, as fundamental health care, covered by OHIP. How does Smitherman respond? “They're terrorists,” and he doesn't negotiate with terrorists. Shame.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to take part in the debate today on Bill 197, An Act to implement Budget measures. Of course, this follows up on the introduction of the budget last spring. We've heard a lot of comments from across the House from different members on Bill 197. I hear the Liberals—I've got to say, Mr. Speaker, and I hope I'm not out of order in saying this, but it's interesting when they only comment in the questions and comments and they're not taking part in the debate. If you're so proud of the budget and so proud of the actions

of the government, I can't understand why you don't take part in the 20-minute rotations. I was looking forward to hearing some comments this afternoon from the government. I know a lot of you are in China; you're over there on the trade mission. I suppose Dalton will try to hide over there as long as he can. But I'm surprised that you're not taking part in the budget measures debate here. Two minutes at a time is simply not enough.

Hon. Mr. Watson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: If the honourable member would give me some of his time, I'd be pleased to take part in the debate right now and talk about some of the good things we're doing in health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. That's not a point of order.

The member from Simcoe North.

Mr. Dunlop: That's interesting. The Minister of Health Promotion would like to take part in the debate. Maybe you could talk some of your colleagues into it; for example, the gentleman sitting beside you or some of the other 11 or 12 members who are here today. It is disappointing when you want to just kill debate and you've got 71 members. It's disappointing to the citizens of Ontario when they see that their government doesn't want to debate its legislation.

I'm glad the minister made that point of order, because I wanted to bring up something. I got your fancy little catalogue. I thought you weren't going to have government advertising. I thought that had come to an end. It was interesting to see a beautiful coloured brochure of you and Mr. Fonseca in that Ministry of Health Promotion catalogue. I thought we had brought that to an end. It's basically government advertising.

Interjection.

Mr. Dunlop: I don't know why you had to have a picture of yourself and Mr. Fonseca in the catalogue if it wasn't needed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Do you mean like this one here?

Mr. Dunlop: Exactly that idea. I thought I heard the Premier and Mr. Phillips, the Chair of Management Board, say, when he brought in that legislation, that there would be no government promotion, no government advertising. In fact, it's happening all over the place now, and that's disappointing, because it is another broken promise; I understand you haven't proclaimed that bill yet.

I want to speak on a number of issues today, on some of the activities that are occurring with the government. Of course, my critic's position is with the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. We've seen, in a case there—in fact, what we've seen in most government ministries is a lot of announcements. You're really great at announcing. You get the minister in front of one of those big red and white billboards, and whatever the ministry's title is, they put a fancy logo behind him and keep making announcements.

As I said earlier, and as I think our leader said today, we've announced 1,000 new cops for the province of Ontario seven times now, and yet when our leader today

asked the Attorney General where those 400 police officers were and how much money they had flowed to those municipalities where the police had been hired, we were given—well, there was no answer at all. He completely refused to comment on that question.

1750

I've heard a lot of comments today in the House on the automotive industry. I don't know how many people in this House have talked to car dealerships lately. I've talked to a number of them, and I'm concerned. When they are standing here bragging about the Toyota announcement, what they're not hearing is from our Big Three auto manufacturers right here in North America: Chrysler, GM and Ford. It's my understanding, when I've talked to car dealerships, that they've given out so many bonuses to try to sell the cars that they are at their limit on how much more they can offer the public in bargains, because car sales, of course, have dropped off substantially in a number of areas, particularly in rural Ontario. People in rural Ontario, the farming communities, simply cannot afford to buy new vehicles any more. They can't afford to buy new pickup trucks. I know a number of car dealerships that in the past have sold a lot of half-tons and three-quarter-ton and four-wheel drives, and they're not selling right now. They're not making any money.

We've seen this government—we know you don't care about rural Ontario. That has been fairly predominant from day one with this government. But quite frankly, when the guys in rural Ontario aren't buying trucks and rural Ontario citizens can't afford to purchase new automobiles, it will have a very, very negative effect on the manufacturing plants in some of the large urban areas. I compliment anybody who can help bring a new automotive plant here, and I do hope that we can get Toyota up and running, because there are spinoff jobs to those particular communities and to the province. But the building is not up and running yet, and that is the concern I've got.

The other thing I think we've got to worry about is the reliability of jobs today and how many people have confidence in the future with their jobs, particularly manufacturing jobs. We've heard our leader here a number of times in the last couple of weeks, and one of the areas we've concentrated on and we've certainly discussed and brought to the attention of the public is the jobs that have been lost in Simcoe-Grey, in Jim Wilson's riding. He named off, I believe, seven or eight large manufacturers in the Collingwood area that have decided to close their doors. That is not a good sign for that part of the province. That is an area of the province that historically, over the last 10 to 15 years, has shown good growth. It has been an exciting part of the province to see develop, and now we're concerned with that as well.

I want to bring to your attention something that I read into the record today, and it boils down to the amount of money that government, the province or the Ministry of Finance, is flowing to the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ms. Pupatello's ministry. We had a

number of petitions read in today. A lot of the community living organizations or associations dropped these petitions off to us in our constituencies last week in constituency week. They were all signed by the staff who work in community living associations across the province. I think Mr. Murdoch read one in, and I know that Mr. Ouellette did as well. The folks who work in the associations make about 25% less than people working in comparable jobs with the province. They're asking the government to flow money to those associations. What is even more remarkable is that while these people are underfunded in their salaries—they are saying they need at least 25% more—at the very same time that they're asking for this money, we're seeing that the province made what I consider to be a very poor decision last year on September 9 when Minister Pupatello announced the closing of the three remaining regional centres. That was very disappointing. The Huronia Regional Centre, in the riding of Simcoe North, amounts to a payroll of \$29 million for the 760 people who work at the Huronia Regional Centre. They're maintaining the lives of some of the most vulnerable physically and mentally challenged people in our province. There are about 331 people remaining in that facility, and the minister has announced that that building will close by 2009.

Now we're going to ask these community living associations to take on the added responsibility of some of the most severely challenged people in our society today. Of the people who are in the group homes today, in the community living organizations, there are some who are severely challenged. But these last 1,000 people who remain in Southwestern, in Rideau Regional Centre and in the Huronia Regional Centre are some of the most severely challenged we've ever seen. Some of them require constant medical attention, 24 hours a day. If the community living organizations are already asking for money to come up with a 25% increase in the salaries allocated to those folks, we don't know where the money will flow to look after the many, many more people who will be required. The minister has said that if the facilities are closed, they will retain the same level of service in the group homes. If we haven't got enough money now for the salaries in the existing facilities, and it's my understanding there is already a shortage of 3,000 spots, my question to the ministry is—maybe someone from the government can answer this in some of the Q and A—where will we find the help, where will we find the money to look after some of the most severely challenged people?

I'm opposed to this process. I think we should retain 1,000 beds in the province of Ontario. I think we should keep them open, because they are living in their own communities today. I find the fact that the government has gone ahead on this decision will be detrimental. Once they're closed, they're closed forever. Trying to find the quality of life and the same level of service, I believe, will be very, very difficult for the community living associations unless substantial money is flowed in their direction. That would mean, at the minimum, \$100 million a year, the cost to run the three remaining regional

centres. On top of that, we would have to have tens of millions of dollars for salary increases and for training of the folks to look after the remaining 1,000 people. It will have a very detrimental effect in my riding.

I know we didn't discuss it in the budget. I know it wasn't one of your election platforms, but today I'm saying here in my time that as we look at a strong economy, as we look at a budget here in the province of Ontario, this decision to close down the Huronia Regional Centre in north Simcoe will have a very negative effect on the city of Orillia and the area. The payroll there is \$29 million, and my belief is that the purchasing power of that \$29 million amounts to somewhere around \$100 million a year to the economy of the area. That will be gone by 2009 if this decision continues on.

There have been some court challenges to it, and I'm assuming the minister won't even respond to any questions now because of the court challenges. But as I talk to people in my riding, they're not very happy with Dalton McGuinty on that decision. We felt that it was rushed. It was rushed because Minister Pupatello was trying to make a strong impact on the community living organizations, and now that we're on this path we think that it will be very difficult to turn this process around. Maybe a couple of more years would have helped before the closure was done, because there was a long-term plan

for it, but 2009 is simply too soon without all the supports being put in place for these 1,000 people who remain in Ontario.

I know I'm coming to an end. Mr. Speaker, am I going to be able to go the full 20 minutes or are you going to cut me off here?

Interjection.

Mr. Dunlop: OK. With that, I think I will wrap up. I actually would like to use my last five or six minutes at another point. Can I do the six minutes now or will you—

The Speaker: You will have the floor for six minutes when we come back.

Mr. Dunlop: Pardon me?

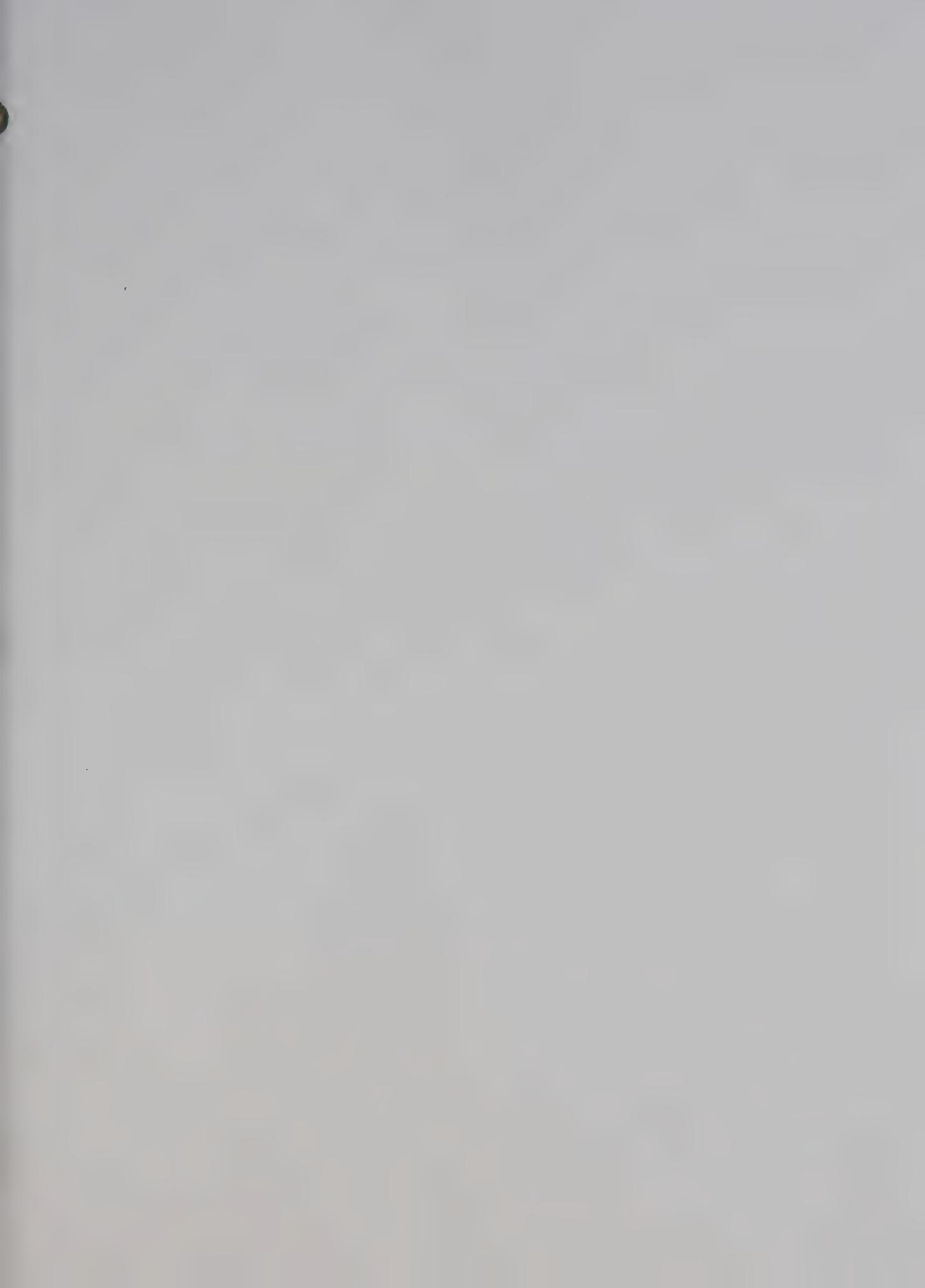
The Speaker: Next time we debate this, you will have six minutes.

Mr. Dunlop: I guess the question is, are you going to cut me off right now? OK. So I will have the other six minutes remaining then.

The Speaker: I'll help you here. It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45 of the clock this evening.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.



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TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Lundi 14 novembre 2005

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2005 modifiant la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement, projet de loi 24, <i>M. O'Toole</i>	
Adoptée.....	769
Loi de 2005 sur les lieux de sépulture des anciens premiers ministres, projet de loi 25, <i>M. Brownell</i>	
Adoptée.....	770

QUESTIONS ORALES

Prix d'excellence	
M. Lalonde	779
M ^{me} Meilleur	779

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2005 sur les mesures budgétaires, projet de loi 197, <i>M. Duncan</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné.....	806

CONTENTS

Monday 14 November 2005

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	
Bullying Awareness Week	
Mr. Klees	767
Agricultural awards	
Mr. Hoy	767
Frederick Banting homestead	
Mr. Wilson.....	767
Affordable housing	
Mr. Marchese.....	768
McMaster Basketball v.	
Bullying event	
Ms. Marsales.....	768
Toronto Police Service conference	
Mr. Dunlop	768
MEDEC	
Mr. Wilkinson.....	768
Esther and Charles Mulli	
Mr. Flynn.....	769
By-election in	
Scarborough-Rouge River	
Mr. Duguid	769
FIRST READINGS	
Environmental Protection	
Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 24, <i>Mr. O'Toole</i>	
Agreed to	769
Mr. O'Toole.....	769
Gravesites of Former Premiers Act,	
2005, Bill 25, <i>Mr. Brownell</i>	
Agreed to	770
Mr. Brownell	770
MOTIONS	
Private members' public business	
Mr. Bradley.....	770
Agreed to	770
Committee membership	
Mr. Bradley.....	770
Agreed to	770
House sittings	
Mr. Bradley.....	770
Agreed to	770
STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES	
Community health centres	
Mr. Smitherman.....	771
Mrs. Witmer.....	773
Ms. Martel	774
Securities legislation	
Mr. Phillips.....	771
Mr. Tascona.....	773
Mr. Prue	774
Diabetes	
Mr. Watson.....	772
Mr. Sterling	773
Ms. Martel.....	774
ORAL QUESTIONS	
Justice system	
Mr. Tory	774
Mr. Bryant	775, 779
Ms. Churley.....	779
Ms. Pupatello.....	779
Sentencing	
Mr. Tory	775
Mr. Bryant	775
Public health system	
Mr. Hampton	776
Mr. Smitherman	776
Hydro rates	
Mr. Hampton	777
Mrs. Cansfield.....	777, 782
Ms. Horwath.....	782
School safety	
Mr. Klees.....	778
Mr. Kennedy	778
Prix d'excellence	
Mr. Lalonde.....	779
Mrs. Meilleur.....	779
Cancer treatment	
Mr. Jackson	780
Mr. Smitherman	780
Hospital funding	
Ms. Martel	780
Mr. Smitherman	781
Student dropout rate	
Mr. Zimmer	781
Mr. Kennedy	781
Metis Nation agreement	
Mr. Miller.....	782
Mr. Ramsay	782
Infrastructure program funding	
Mrs. Van Bommel.....	783
Mr. Caplan	783
Community care access centres	
Mrs. Witmer	783
Mr. Smitherman	783
PETITIONS	
Services for the developmentally disabled	
Mr. Ouellette	784
Mr. Dunlop.....	785
Mr. Murdoch	787
Cancer treatment	
Ms. Martel	784, 785
Immigrants' skills	
Mr. Delaney	784
Mr. Craitor	786
Macular degeneration	
Mr. Craitor	785
Mr. Delaney	787
Frederick Banting homestead	
Mr. Wilson.....	785
Prostate cancer	
Mr. Delaney	786
Gamma Foundries	
Mr. Klees	786
Health care funding	
Mr. O'Toole.....	786
SECOND READINGS	
Budget Measures Act, 2005, Bill 197,	
<i>Mr. Duncan</i>	
Mr. Yakabuski	787, 791, 803
Ms. Martel	789, 791, 795
Mr. Leal	790
Mr. Miller	790, 795
Mr. Bradley	790, 799
Mrs. Mitchell	794
Mr. Dunlop	794, 804
Mr. McNeely	795
Mr. Flaherty	796, 800
Mr. Kormos	799, 800, 804
Mr. Jackson	799, 803
Mr. Brownell	800
Mrs. Sandals	802
Mr. Watson	803
Debate deemed adjourned.....	806

Continued overleaf



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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 14 November 2005

Lundi 14 novembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 14 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 14 novembre 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TRANSPORTATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE TRANSPORT

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 1, 2005, on the motion for third reading of Bill 169, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters / Projet de loi 169, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et modifiant et abrogeant diverses autres lois à l'égard de questions relatives au transport.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Further debate? I believe it was with the government. It's not. Then I recognize the member from Oak Ridges.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Thank you, Speaker. I was quite certain that it was the official opposition that was next in line, and here we go.

I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 169, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters. At the outset, I want to make it very clear that I will be supporting this bill. I'll be supporting this bill because I have somewhat of an affinity to this bill as the former Minister of Transportation. The staff at the Ministry of Transportation will know that during my time as minister, I worked with them very closely on most of the provisions of this bill, so I'm pleased to see it here. It's not very often that we, as members of the Legislature, have an opportunity, frankly, to be able to support a piece of legislation that is brought forward by this government, because quite often it lacks in good common sense, the legislation that's brought forward, and often there are areas of the legislation that we would take exception with or have exception to.

In this particular case, in large part this legislation I can support, and I believe you will hear from other members in our caucus in the official opposition who will also be supporting the legislation.

I want to, at the outset, congratulate the staff of the Ministry of Transportation on the good work they've done on this legislation. Mr. Bruce McCuaig, with whom I had the opportunity to work, is the assistant deputy

minister of policy, planning and standards—very conscientious in the work that he has done. Mr. Frank D'Onofrio, the acting deputy minister, again is someone for whom I have a great deal of respect. I know that they certainly provided the continuity in terms of the deliberations and discussions that took place. I want to compliment the Minister of Transportation for taking up the provisions of this legislation, notwithstanding the fact that, in large part, it is legislation that was tabled by the previous government. I think he shows his wisdom in terms of bringing forward legislation that will serve the people of Ontario very well.

In large part, it deals with safety measures that are important to have in place. It provides in some areas of the bill the authority and the appropriate regulatory support for our police services with regard to matters that they have been lobbying the government on for many years. That, for example, is the area of being able to clear traffic when there's an accident and ensure that there isn't liability on the part of police officers who take the initiative to ensure that debris and car crashes are removed from the highways. We have enough difficulty in this province, certainly in the greater Toronto area, with gridlock. We all know what happens the minute there is an accident on any of the major thoroughfares: Traffic is often backed up for hours simply because of one accident that takes place. Common sense would say, why leave the car and the debris in the middle of the highway? Why can't that be removed? That is a logical question that I put when I was the minister, and I was told, "Well, the reason you can't is because of liability issues and because the regulations don't allow for protection for police officers and emergency personnel." So the question I put was, "What is it that we have to change in legislation to provide that protection?"

1850

To the government's credit, they are bringing this forward. I think that that, in itself, is going to be a very significant measure to ensure that we can begin the very common sense process of clearing some of these gridlock issues that we face in Ontario.

I'm going to speak to a number of other areas that I think it's important, first of all, for the public to understand that this legislation is going to be dealing with; and also for stakeholders to understand the rationale as to why we're bringing this forward.

I drive back and forth from my constituency every day, along with literally thousands of people, and the route I take and am committed to take is the 404/Don

Valley Parkway. When I first moved into the York region area, it used to take me about 35 minutes to drive from York region down to the centre of the city. It now is an hour to an hour and a half, and if it's raining or snowing it can be a two-hour or two-and-a-half-hour trek.

The challenge of gridlock for people in the greater Toronto area is just huge. So one of the things that this bill will do, as part of the bigger picture in terms of supporting a move toward public transit, is to create high-occupancy lanes. The intention I had when I was Minister of Transportation was that we create additional net high-occupancy lanes so that with any new construction that takes place on a major thoroughfare—the 400 series of highways, for example—we keep in mind the importance of HOV lanes.

I support the provision in this legislation, therefore, that provides for HOV designation of high-occupancy lanes. I would have preferred if the legislation referred to "net new lanes." In other words, I do have some concerns that by simply designating existing lanes as HOV lanes we potentially are going to be creating a greater problem in the short term than we are solving, because now, as we travel south or north on the Don Valley Parkway or the 404 extension, all lanes are plugged. It's true that many of those cars—I'm included—have one driver. The objective of this legislation, of course, is to encourage carpooling and have some people leave their cars at home, and I was hoping that the HOV designation would be targeted to new lanes that are built as we widen these highways. Nevertheless, I can live with what we have here.

I also support and believe that it's innovative of the government to move forward on the variable speed limit systems that the ministry is saying they are prepared to experiment with and to bring on. The idea here is that many of the accidents that occur, occur because of bad driving. It's not necessarily the speed limit, it's how one drives within those speed limits—and the weather conditions. I'm ever amazed when there is heavy rain or when it snows or when there's fog and you have people who will pass and will still think that because the speed limit says 100, somehow they have this God-given right to drive 100, when what the speed limit presumes is some common sense. Common sense says if it's pouring rain, you slow your speed down and the top speed at that point may well be 80; or if there's fog, that you're wise enough to slow down. Here's the problem: Some people do, but it's the odd person who doesn't, and that's where the major problems occur.

What is intended in this section—I'm well familiar because I was involved in those discussions—is that we have a system of variable speed limits where we can actually instantaneously change the speed limit on changeable signs on these major thoroughfares to facilitate the road conditions. So that if we have a heavy fog, or if it is raining or if there is a snow storm, we have interchangeable signs that can then provide that kind of speed limit guidance to people travelling on the roads. Again, I think it's forward thinking. I fully support it, I

think it's the right thing to do, and I look forward to the ministry moving forward with that technology.

There are other aspects of this legislation that I think are long overdue. I'm sorry, quite frankly, that this legislation wasn't introduced two years ago, that the government didn't just follow through with the legislation as we had passed it, because the next item I'm going to speak to should already be implemented, and that is enhancing construction zone safety. As we all know—we've all experienced it—when we drive down major highways and construction is going on, people don't have the good sense to change lanes and they don't have the good sense to slow down. This part of the legislation is going to provide for very strict penalties for people who don't exercise that kind of common sense. I believe that this is all about saving lives. There are far too many lives that have been lost in this province, road construction workers who have lost their lives because of carelessness, and I believe this is the appropriate measure to be taken on.

The issue of increasing the penalties for driver licence fraud: Again, I support that fully. At this point in time, I want to take the opportunity, however, to speak to another issue, and that is the fraud that's taking place in this province relating not just to drivers' licences, but to safety inspection certificates for automobiles, for reconstructed automobiles. I put a question to the minister relating to one of my constituents who recently purchased a car, his first car. A young man saved up \$7,000 to buy this car so that he could go to and from work. He bought the car from someone who held himself up as a car dealer. After driving that car—which had a safety certificate with the stamp of the Ministry of Transportation on it—for about a week, he found out that it was out of alignment, took it to another inspection station and it was found to be absolutely unsafe to drive.

Clearly, what happened was that whoever did that first safety inspection, did it fraudulently. It should never have had a Ministry of Transportation stamp on it. What I want to see the government do is to go after people like that, who are essentially robbing constituents, Ontario citizens, of hard-earned money. Because now we have a young man who doesn't have his \$7,000, he doesn't have a car to drive, and he's left to his own resources to go after the person who sold him the car. He now has to go through the court system, and unfortunately the Ministry of Transportation is essentially washing its hands of the entire affair. That's wrong.

What I believe should happen is that the Ministry of Transportation should be front and centre saying, "We will join with you and we will take that person to court," because at the end of the day, there is a sense of responsibility that the Ministry of Transportation has.

1900

The minister is going to hear much more about this file from me, because I'm not going to let it stand. It's my responsibility as a member of the Legislature to help this young man work his way through this. I'm hoping that the ministry will in fact see the wisdom of ensuring that these inspectors and this inspection station are

prosecuted to the nth degree. I also would want to see the Ministry of Transportation take whatever steps are necessary to help this young man recover his hard-earned money, and to ensure that things are made right.

I only have a few minutes left, but I want to speak to an area of the bill that I don't support, and there's only one. I raised this issue during the public hearings, I appealed to the minister, and I appealed to the members of the government who sit on that standing committee. The minister has refused to take this step, and I'm going to just say on behalf of many hard-working Ontarians who are taxicab drivers in the city of Toronto—who are being discriminated against because of existing legislation and regulations—that I think it's unfortunate that the minister is not prepared to come to their support.

The situation is this, as you well know: We have a situation in the greater Toronto area where limousine drivers who are licensed to pick up fares at the airport in Toronto also have the right to pick up fares, now, in the city of Toronto. That makes good, common sense. You pick a fare up at the airport; you drive them to the city. Does it not make sense that one should then be able to pick up a fare in the city of Toronto to go back to the airport? It just makes good, common sense.

Well, here is the problem: The minister is giving that kind of endorsement and right to limousine drivers who are licensed to do business in the Toronto airport. What cab drivers in the city of Toronto want is a level playing field. The way it is now, they can certainly pick up a fare in the city of Toronto and take that fare to the airport, but they cannot pick up a fare at the airport unless they go through a hoop of having a pre-arranged pickup with someone who knows exactly the time that they want to be picked up there, and then they can make accommodation through their offices to pick up that fare. I think that just makes no sense whatsoever.

We want and we encourage these businesses, and many of these people are small business people; they work very hard. They simply want the opportunity to pick up a fare at the airport if they have taken someone from downtown Toronto to the airport. Doesn't it make sense that they have the right to pick up a fare of someone who is wanting to go downtown from the airport so that they don't have to go back downtown with an empty car? They still have to pay for the gas and the insurance—they have all of the expenses—and yet this government is saying no to these people.

Now, the argument came forward from the government that this is something that should be negotiated with the city of Toronto through the new negotiations they're going through with the Municipal Act and so on. I put forward in committee a proposal that simply would have the government not proclaim that part of the bill that relates to this until the city of Toronto had an opportunity to negotiate that level playing field in their negotiations with the government of Ontario. That would simply allow that time frame for the fair thing to be done. This minister and this government have refused to do that. And it's disappointing, because for that period of

time it continues to leave Toronto taxi drivers in a very unfair situation and, quite frankly, a hardship situation.

In conclusion, I want to reaffirm my support for the bill in general. I've spoken to a number of components of the bill that I think are very positive going forward. I'm extremely disappointed that the government has not been willing to at least hold back on proclaiming that one section of the act relating to this until the matter can be dealt with. We will see what happens. There's still time for the government to change their mind on this, and I hope they will.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: I congratulate the member for Oak Ridges for his remarks. I congratulate him for all of the work he did on this bill that the Liberals now have done, for which they are taking a great deal of credit. I congratulate him as a former minister for not adopting the Raminder Gill amendment by way of a bill that would have done exactly what this government has done. If you recall, I think Raminder Gill, a former Conservative member, had introduced in a private member's bill anti-scooping legislation that would have given preference to limousine drivers in the GTA over Toronto taxi drivers. To the credit of the Conservative Party at the time, to the credit of the minister, Monsieur Klees from Oak Ridges, they rejected those amendments. But lo and behold, the Liberals have adopted all of the positive things he spoke about, that the government is proud of, that I will be supporting in about 10 minutes as I speak to this bill.

But they have adopted that which the Tories rejected when they were in power, and that is, they have adopted Raminder Gill's bill that the Liberals are now proud to adopt as their own. I congratulate the Minister of Transportation for adopting it, for assuming it with pride. And not only he, but a lot of Liberal members who were part of that committee adopted this amendment with pride and glee and satisfaction—in fact can't get enough of it—and all attacking the Toronto taxi drivers with grave satisfaction, knowing fully well that they're pleasing their friends in the GTA. God bless you. I'll have an opportunity to speak to this.

Frank, congratulations on all your good work.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I was glad to hear the member say he's in favour of the bill. This is the third day of third reading on this bill. I listened to his leader, John Tory, say he was going to do politics differently in Ontario. I used to read about that in Ian Urquhart's column. I hope Ian Urquhart is watching tonight, to see the Conservative Party, which has allowed only one bill to be passed in this session—in four weeks, one bill to be passed—now delaying once again.

I thought the member's speech was quite appropriate tonight. I want to say that to him. I want to commend him on his speech. But I do want to say that this is the third day of third reading. It may have happened, but I can't recall a bill in which there were three days of third reading. I just hope that the leader of the Conservative

Party, John Tory, who was going to do things so differently in politics and looked upon this House as anachronistic because of some of the things that have been done in years gone by, takes note of what's happening on this particular bill when he speaks to his caucus tomorrow.

1910

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I also want to commend the member on his speech, because Frank drafted a lot of this when he was minister, and unfortunately, it wasn't passed at that time. But in the bill we do have this problem of the taxis.

I want to also comment on my good friend from St. Catharines mentioning that our leader said he would do things differently. Do you know something? In the last election, I remember a leader on that side saying that everything was going to be different. There were so many things that were going to change, and we were going to have more democracy here, and backbenchers were going to be asked what they thought—all these big promises. I think the guy's name was McGuinty; I believe I'm right. Mr. McGuinty mentioned that he was going to change the face of this place and everything would be so good and so wonderful.

My good friend from St. Catharines mentioned that this is the third day of debate on third reading. I believe he's the House leader, and I would hope that he's treating the House leaders from the other two parties somewhat nicely, because they can make deals on this. Maybe they could get us out of night sittings. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I always vote against those night sittings, because this is what happens, but all the government members certainly vote for them, and they do it right to a line. They're told by that guy who ran an election that things were going to change. The whip wasn't going to run everything; the whip wasn't going to tell everybody how to vote.

As you noticed, member from St. Catharines, we have free votes over here, but unfortunately that has not happened on the Liberal side yet. That's an unfortunate thing that has not happened over two years. I guess the leader of the Liberal Party has forgotten about those promises. I guess so many have been broken that it doesn't really matter.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I remember vividly the leader of the official opposition continuing to vote for night sittings, so I think maybe the member opposite had better talk to him and see whether he can convince him not to do this. I also did some checking into his own voting record when he was in government. As much as he's this maverick that everybody wants to talk about, he never voted against his government. In terms of how easy it is to do things on that side, it's very difficult to make sure we have all of the cats lined up.

The member opposite from Oak Ridges made some good points. I want to ask him if he remembers the three private members' bills I brought in to deal with the safety issue when he was in government and Minister of Transportation. I was sent back a letter that said it was going to

be taken care of, and that was in 2001. I'm not sure whether those were addressed. The good news is that it's getting addressed now, and I like the thought that we want to move this bill forward. I really look forward to getting this thing passed.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Oak Ridges has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Klees: The member from Brant is absolutely right. That is why the measures he proposed were contained in this bill. Had we been re-elected as the government, it would have been dealt with two years ago, because it was in the bill I had tabled.

I thank the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his encouraging remarks. He's absolutely right in terms of how we are doing things differently. What the leader of the official opposition has said, and what he meant about doing things differently, is that we would take this place seriously and we would take seriously the debate on the issues. So to be called down for having spent three days on third reading—I'm sure people who are watching this are saying, "Minister of Tourism, what's wrong with that, that members of the Legislature take time to articulate their concerns and recommendations—and support—for a piece of legislation?" That is exactly what John Tory meant when he said we're going to do things differently. We're going to take this place seriously, and we're going to articulate our concerns both for and against legislation. I think the member heard me say some very positive things about this legislation. It's not all negative, and I think we're true to our word.

To the member from Trinity-Spadina, I look forward to hearing his remarks because I think that, as a resident of the city of Toronto and someone who represents a riding in the city of Toronto, he fully understands the issue I was trying to bring forward with regard to Toronto taxi drivers who are simply asking this government for a level playing field, and the government has turned its back on them. He's right: We turned down a private member's bill because we wanted this matter to be done right. This legislation does not have it right.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Marchese: I welcome the citizens of Ontario to this parliamentary channel. We are on live, and it's 7:15. Welcome to this political forum; it's one of the best shows we've got in town, and that is why people keep tuning in, day in and day out, catching their favourite MPPs talk about issues that citizens know so much about.

I am happy to speak to Bill 169, and I first of all want to go through a couple of items as a way of showing the Liberals that New Democrats can agree with them from time to time on a number of issues. Then I will attack the Liberals as best I can on matters of disagreement, and we have many of those we well.

Some of the positive elements of this bill: high occupancy vehicle lanes on 400-series highways and allowing for the use of paved shoulders for certain vehicles, which we presume to be buses or high-occupancy vehicles—a good thing, and God bless; we need it, and we need it fast. The minister needs to get on with this.

We need it to help reduce traffic gridlock and, hopefully, reduce the number of cars on the road. As you know, and as citizens know, we are well behind other North American jurisdictions in this regard. We agree with that.

It allows municipalities to lower speed limits to 30 kilometres per hour in traffic-calming areas and construction zones. We think this is a safety matter, and that's good. Many will argue that we can't crawl any slower than that, but as a safety issue, a whole lot of people say, "We can live with that," and we support this issue as well.

On vehicles registered in northern Ontario, light-weight studded tires will be allowed. We support that as well; we think it's a positive measure.

Provisions aimed at allowing police to clear roads more quickly following accidents in an attempt to reduce delays and gridlock is a positive thing. We support that as well.

It creates new offences for flying vehicle parts, not just truck wheels as at present. We think that's a good thing. It improves daily commercial vehicle inspection standards by requiring drivers to check over 70 itemized defects daily. Clearly, those are positive things that the Tories thought were good and that the Liberals have adopted as their own. We think those are positive measures.

But on some of these aspects we think that safety provisions are one thing but having the funds to ensure they are enforced is another. Where we fail in so many of the bills we present in this Legislature has to do with enforcement. If you don't have the people to monitor, to catch the problems when they happen and where they happen, it doesn't matter that you might have increased the fines from \$150 to a couple of hundred, or whatever the amount is. Without enforcement, it won't be much of a deterrent.

What this government doesn't do well is enforce the laws it passes. It claims it does, but we all know they're strapped for cash. We know they only broke one promise—not to increase taxes—and that was to raise a health tax with which they raised \$2.4 billion. But they need to spread that money around so it isn't just used for health; it's used for many other things, in spite of the claims they make. That \$2.4 billion can never recover the lost \$13 billion that has been taken away by the Tories in the form of income tax cuts and corporate tax cuts.

We are raising \$2.4 billion to cover all the broken promises the Liberals have made and to cover aspects of the health field that are incredibly expensive. That is why they have frozen and capped so much of the funds that would otherwise go to many of the ministries, 15 of which have been flatlined and/or taken a hit, meaning cuts have been sustained in those ministries, including francophone affairs, aboriginal issues, the Ministry of Culture and 12 other ministries. They don't have any money. They have to cut services. They don't have the money for enforcement. When they say, "We're going to hire 1,000 cops," they're not coming because they don't

have the money and because the cities don't have the money to match them.

So enforcement, each and every time, as it relates to anything this government does, is bound to fail. You're going to increase the fee to whatever amount you want—although they're not excessive for serious infractions—but without the cops to be there to catch the culprits, nothing will happen.

1920

So I speak positively of some of the measures this government has introduced and speak poorly of them as it relates to the issue of enforcement. They won't do it because they can't do it. There's no new money coming into the provincial coffers to be able to deal with this. So in spite of all that they say, they will fail on the component of enforcement.

My serious attack on this government has to do with what 90% of the deputants had to say about Bill 169. The majority of people that came to our hearings were Toronto taxi drivers. We had very few deputants—except for the fire chiefs, to which I will allude in a moment—coming to speak to the elements that I've spoken of or others that I have not mentioned. In fact, one could probably count them on one hand. The majority of them were limousine drivers from the GTA and taxi drivers from Toronto. Rarely have you seen the sizable demonstrations that we have witnessed outside of this assembly in the time this government has been in power, where the number of people has been so great, as Toronto taxi drivers who have come to complain about one aspect of this bill that they believe, and quite correctly, infringes on them in a pecuniary way—and I'll explain in a couple of minutes. You will recall that when the Tories were here, we had thousands of people demonstrating outside. We didn't like it and the people out there didn't like it. That particular government, the Conservative government, was quite nasty. So when you see, on two occasions, hundreds and hundreds of taxi drivers come to this place to protest what you are about to do with this bill, it speaks to a serious concern that people have.

They have been, I argue, completely disregarded by this government, by this minister and by the committee members who I saw speaking and asking questions of the Toronto taxi drivers. They had no regard for the concerns that Toronto taxi drivers raised in that one-day hearing that we had to speak to this particular issue. Oh, yes, you had a Toronto member come for a short while—he's not here at the moment, but he sits right behind me—and he made it appear that he was very concerned about the Toronto taxi drivers and that they might, when they look at the Municipal Act, possibly look at that act with a view to changing it as a way of possibly satisfying the Toronto taxi drivers. He left after an hour and a half or two. Once he left, all the other committee members were disdainful of the concerns that were raised by the Toronto taxi drivers.

Toronto taxi drivers see section 4 as further entrenching unjust practices—practices established and governed by another piece of legislation, namely, the

Municipal Act. They rightly ask themselves, "Why are anti-scooping amendments being introduced to the Highway Traffic Act and not to the Municipal Act under which the taxi industry is licensed?" That's the question they asked, and we asked it too. They believe, and rightly so, that this has been done to the favour of one taxi jurisdiction over another, benefiting the airport taxi and limousine drivers at the expense of Toronto taxi and limousine drivers.

The Toronto taxi industry sees section 4 of this bill as a way of strengthening the existing system that allows airport taxis and limos to pick up fares within the city of Toronto largely at will, while the city of Toronto licensed taxi and limousine drivers must pay a \$10 fee and line up at the airport in the hope of getting a return fare downtown. They said, and I agree with them, it's a matter of fairness. We know taxi drivers hardly earn a gainful living. We know that what they earn is insufficient to make a good living. We know that limousine drivers outside of Toronto are doing marginally better. This is not to argue that they are wealthy men and women, but they are doing marginally better than Toronto taxi drivers.

I am not saying that limousine drivers in the GTA are well-to-do, wealthy and unwilling to give up a little bit of the extra. I am arguing, however, that the Toronto taxi driver is doing very, very poorly, can barely eke out a living. We say that fairness and justice must apply to them so that they both are able to earn a living, as poor as it is, so that one is not disadvantaged over the other.

The GTA drivers were not willing to be fair in this matter. The Liberal members were unwilling to be fair in this matter. I was there, and there was not one Liberal member sitting there who spoke with a sense of understanding, a sense and a willingness to perhaps change the Municipal Act, with a sense that perhaps they might not want to support section 4 of this act that speaks poorly and treats unjustly the Toronto taxi driver. They did not want to do that.

So I deduced in my simple way that the Liberal members on that committee were not keen on supporting them. They weren't listening. They tried to make arguments to try to diminish those Toronto taxi drivers who brought forth good arguments. I recall—and I didn't mean to make fun of one of the limousine drivers from the GTA. I said, "So you're saying that when you come to Toronto, you sometimes spend two hours waiting for a pickup?" He said yes. I pursued it and I said, "I heard from you and others that sometimes you also wait two hours at the airport." He said yes. So I said, "You wait two hours in Toronto for a pickup, you wait two hours at the airport for a pickup, which totals four hours. When do you work?" They made it appear as if they wait for two hours there and two hours here, and if that is the case, they're not working. It's impossible.

Of course they're working and of course they're picking up people in Toronto. In many cases, they have an arrangement with some hotels. In fact, one of them told us they have an arrangement with a downtown hotel, with them specifically—not with Toronto taxi drivers but

with them specifically, automatically causing an unjust one-way ticket with the limousine folks from the GTA. It was said publicly in committee. It didn't matter what I asked, the limousine drivers from the GTA were unmoved. They too were disdainful of me and the Toronto taxi drivers. All that these Toronto people are looking for—as the member from Oak Ridges said—is a levelling of the playing field.

Instead of opening the Municipal Act to level the playing field between the airport drivers and the Toronto drivers, the government has opted to amend the Highway Traffic Act in such a way as to further entrench the existing system, which unfairly confers economic benefit on the airport taxi and limousine driver at the expense of the Toronto taxi driver.

This is why, my friends, Liberals and Tories, we've seen so many demonstrations by the Toronto taxi drivers at Queen's Park, the most recent of which was on October 4. The current Speaker was there, and my colleague Michael Prue was there to lend a hand, to support them, to bring about some justice to the Toronto taxi driver. We were on hand because we believe that fairness ought to be the goal of any government, and it should be the goal of a Liberal government that often prides itself on being fair to the little guy and to the big guy. Why, they represent everybody equally all of the time, except in this particular instance they are not. You're left to wonder why.

1930

There was reference made to a fundraiser where people paid 200 bucks to attend a Liberal fundraising event, and they were all limousine drivers, as far as we could tell, as far as we know; 200 bucks—that's a whole lot of pecunia. The Speaker will know that when you have an NDP event, if you have an event—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): —five hundred dollars.

M. Marchese: Pardon, Madame la ministre?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Five hundred dollars.

M. Marchese: Madame la ministre dit, « Cinquante dollars ». Pour aller où?

Interjection: Fifty dollars?

Mr. Marchese: No, no, you've got it all wrong. Madame la ministre. The Liberals and the Tories: \$700 events for the Tories, God bless you all, and the Liberals have \$600 events, God bless you all, and the competition between them is 100 bucks. Then they have \$200 events. I've got to tell you, if an NDP has an event of 200 bucks, it has to be extraordinary, and I don't know who goes. A Michael Prue must be similar to a Marchese in Trinity-Spadina, but when we have an event, if you charge more than 50 bucks, good luck. We can't raise that kind of money.

When you grease the Liberal wheel with 200 pecuniae to attend, that's a whole lot of political favours that one could buy with that kind of money, God bless. How come, Mr. Prue, we're not so lucky as to be able to bring these people with bucks? How come they don't support

us the way they support the Liberals and the Tories? What is it about the NDP? Is it that we don't support those who have a high interest in what's called the greenback, the pecunia as I call it in Latin, the dinaro as we say in Italian? What do we say in Greek?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Lima; a beautiful word.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Hrima.

Mr. Marchese: Hrima? You have to be careful with that one, because that could be dangerous.

It's all about hrima, it's about pecunia, and that's how you grease the Liberal wheels. They make no bones about it.

Mr. Murdoch: What about those unions?

Mr. Marchese: Well, the unions, Bill, give you as much money as they give us. You may not know this, but you've got a whole lot of friends in the union movement. Don't put them down. The Liberals have an equal number of union friends. Don't you put them down, although you don't defend them, ever.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: No.

Mr. Marchese: No. I know.

Madame la ministre dit qu'elle n'appuie pas le secteur—c'est quoi le secteur « unions »?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Le secteur syndical.

M. Marchese: Le secteur syndical. C'est le mot que je cherchais mais ça ne me venait pas tout à coup. C'est pourquoi vous êtes là, pour m'aider. Merci pour être là quand on a besoin de vous.

L'hon. M^{me} Bountrogianni: En grec, sindicata.

Mr. Marchese: In Greek it's the same. Speaker, don't you love the interaction? You see how we are able to interact in Greek, French—it's such a beautiful place.

What we ask the government is to sever the bill. Sever the bill so we can support the positive stuff in the beginning of my remarks and take this portion, section 4, that is deleterious to Toronto taxi drivers, out of the bill. If you do that, you have our support. You will have achieved the fairness that people are looking for, and that the New Democrats are looking for, for Toronto taxi drivers. You are unwilling to do that.

You accepted one amendment, which had to do with the fire chiefs. They felt that firefighters are often the first to respond to an accident scene, having legal authorization for traffic control. We moved an amendment that would allow them to do that, and the Liberals accepted that. We moved an amendment for them to sever this bill so section 4 would not be part of it; they didn't accept it. You do that, and you will have the support of New Democrats for both components of this bill. We hope you will consider it.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments about Bill 169. It is really quite gratifying to hear, particularly from the opposition side, their support for this bill, and we appreciate that. There are some very good things in this bill. We seem to

have agreement on both sides of the aisle in that regard. Here at third reading, after the bill had gone to committee, we're very pleased that we're hearing this support from both opposition parties for Bill 169.

In 2001, I introduced a private member's bill that would double the fines in a construction zone. The former Minister of Transportation didn't see to do that, but he agrees with it tonight, and the other Minister of Transportation certainly must have been aware of this bill. They did not like it at the time they were in government, but they like it here tonight. It's passing strange, I find, that they have this great change of mind, but we welcome that.

The family of Dick Van Rooyen, who was killed in my riding while placing these cones, or barrels, as people have called them, on the highway, will appreciate this bill as well. Dick Van Rooyen was killed on Highway 401 near Ridgetown in my riding when someone slammed into the vehicle he was riding in the back of putting these cones on the highway. That's why I called for doubling the fines in construction zones. I'm very, very pleased that we have agreement on that part of this bill and the broad spectrum of the bill in total.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I want to draw the members' attention to a letter that I know the Minister of Transportation has received. It's from Carolyn Forbes. It was actually sent to Cam Jackson, and as a dutiful member he passed it on to me as the critic for transportation. It's an e-mail. It says, "I've written to the Minister of Transportation and received a reply that says he will not answer the question. It was sent to legal services branch of MTO and I was refused an answer there as well. I was told that I had to hire a lawyer and go to court and have a judge tell us the answer. This is totally unacceptable." She goes on to outline several pieces under the Highway Traffic Act, not specific only to Bill 169. It shows the intransigence of this government to listen to constructive suggestions.

As the member from Trinity-Spadina mentioned—I should put on the record correspondence dated September 29 from Mayor David Miller's office. Mayor Miller is quite sympathetic to the NDP as well as the Liberals—I haven't quite figured out which party yet.

He says, "I am writing to express ... council's position on Bill 169 with respect to 'scooping' taxi fares. At its meeting on May 17-19, 2005, council adopted Planning and Transportation Report 4, clause 3, which included the following motion by Councillor Howard Moscoe: '...the city indicate its opposition to Bill 169 as it pertains to 'scooping' fares at the airport, unless it is amended to remove the exemption that permits airport licensed vehicles from 'scooping' fares within the city of Toronto, and the Minister of Transportation and opposition critics be so advised....'"

Mayor Miller signs this. He says, "I support council's position on this matter."

We've said to the minister that by and large—both Norm Sterling and Frank Klees were transportation ministers—most of the parts of Bill 169 we agree with.

Our leader, John Tory, has made it eminently clear: Simply do not proclaim section 4 of the bill and we will be supportive, as is David Miller.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I just want to point out to members of the House and particularly those who might be watching that this bill has been debated thoroughly by the opposition and the government. It has had first reading, which is not a debate, but a very extensive second reading, and very extensive committee hearings; we wanted to make those available for people who wanted to comment on the bill, and those were made available. Ordinarily, what happens, for the edification of our new member of the Legislature, the leader of the official opposition, is that on third reading, for a number of years, it was essentially a nod. It was an automatic third reading, similar to first reading. From time to time there has been debate on third reading, but it has largely been limited to one day.

1940

This bill is now on its third day of debate on third reading. Only one bill has passed this session of the Legislature in four weeks. The leader of the official opposition says that he is in favour of a new way of doing politics, that he thinks this House is anachronistic in many ways, that legislation should not be blocked simply for the sake of blocking it. And yet I keep hearing, having had an opportunity, as the government should have on second reading, to speak extensively and to have committee—he now wants to drag this out on third reading.

I cannot recall—perhaps a former House leader can recall for me—any instances where you had three days of third reading debate. So I know that the leader of the official opposition, who wants to change the way this House works and who has been commended by Ian Urquhart in his Toronto Star column for doing so, will want to ensure that this debate concludes with the official opposition voting for the bill.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I feel persuaded to stand, as a former House leader. When the Liberal government was in opposition, I was the House leader for three years. Day after day the Liberal opposition would stand up, make lengthy, meaningless speeches on bills of minor content, and hold this Legislature up for ransom night after night after night. They have absolutely nothing to complain about with regard to our debate on this bill.

We have acted reasonably on numerous pieces of legislation in front of this Legislature over the last two years. I think we have forced the government to go to time allocation once or twice. We were forced to go to time allocation on 60 or so different occasions because they acted without reason in their debate. So for them to stand up and say that we've been three days in debate over a bill on which we stand for a very important principle for the taxi drivers of Toronto, is absolutely ridiculous and outrageous. Look at the record. Go back and look at the record of the Liberals when they were in opposition. They held this place for days and days with-

out any kind of reasonable debate. They were talking about everything and anything.

This bill is good in many aspects, as other speakers have said, but there is one principle. The one thing that our leader, John Tory, has made clear to this Legislature is, when there is a principle in the bill that's worth fighting for, we will fight for it.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Trinity–Spadina has two minutes in which to comment.

Mr. Marchese: I listened to the member from Chatham–Kent Essex, with his selective hearing. He says, “We’re so happy the opposition parties are supporting us,” and he went on, blah, blah, blah, for two minutes, saying how we support them. He completely overlooks what I said in opposition to the bill. It’s fascinating. Then the Minister of Tourism stands up; another two minutes of blah, blah as well.

I’ve got to tell you, it gets to be painful after a while. I was critical of my own government when we were in power, because often, when I was in committee, I would say, “What’s wrong with what some of the opposition members are saying?” Because some of the things that opposition members have to say are useful and practical. After 15 years, you get tired. The Liberals get into power and they behave like Tories. Tories get into power—

Interjections.

Mr. Marchese: It’s a vicious, stupid, dumb political cycle. Everyone gets into power, they smile. They get into opposition and it’s like they forgot what they were doing in government. It’s just painful.

Minister of Tourism, when you say what you’re saying, the majority of people who came to that one-day hearing were taxi drivers from Toronto saying, “Please don’t do this.” I’m tired. I thought it was a reasonable request they made. Put this off. Deal with that particular issue under municipal affairs, under the Municipal Act, which you’re about to change. Deal with it then.

Toronto taxis are saying, “You’re treating us unfairly. We can’t go to the airport. We’ve got to pay a \$10 fee. We can’t line up, but you limousine drivers from the GTA can come to Toronto, pick up and go back: \$40 a pop or more each time you come to Toronto. Toronto taxis can’t do that.”

It was a fair request they made of you. Please listen. Don’t “blah, blah” and pretend you’re not hearing what we’re saying in opposition. It’s an easy amendment to make. You have time to make that change; you have time to listen.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I too am pleased to join the debate here on Bill 169, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters.

I think we’re all in agreement here, with the exception of the Liberals. We’re in agreement on this side of the House that there are many components of this bill that we feel are important to get enacted into legislation. We’re articulating that support here on those particular sections

of the bill, such as the increased penalties for cars that ignore pedestrian crossings, doubling the speeding fines in construction zones—I'll speak on these a little later in a little more detail—enforcing the high-occupancy vehicle lanes to encourage car-pooling, giving police more power to clear accident scenes, creating new offences for vehicles with flying vehicle parts, improving daily commercial vehicle inspection standards, allowing for the use of studded tires in northern Ontario, and other provisions.

However, we are hung up on one serious disagreement. My colleague from Oak Ridges has articulated that; my colleague from Lanark–Carleton has, in a short address as of yet, articulated that it's on principle that we are standing and continuing this debate on this particular bill, and that is the wrongness, the absolute unfairness, of section 4, which would make two sets of rules, basically: one for limousine drivers servicing the Toronto airport, and another one for Toronto taxicabs.

I listened to some of the deputations at the committee hearings, and it is clear that the members of the government at that committee had simply put the cotton in their ears and said, "Let them say whatever they want to say. We're not going to pay any attention to them at all." These are human beings who are working hard in a very difficult career to make a living, to support their families, working absolutely ungodly hours under difficult conditions, night and day, seven days a week. They're asking for fairness on the part of this government when it comes to picking up fares and ferrying passengers from one location to another.

When I get into a cab in the city here, I ask them, "How are you guys feeling about this? How are you affected by this?" Well, that's all you've got to ask them, and they'll tell you the rest. They'll tell you how unfair it is and how difficult it is in this day and age, driving a taxi in the city of Toronto, to make a decent enough living to support your wife and children.

1950

Most of these drivers in the city are visible minorities. It is not like they've got a lot of career choices: "Well, taxi driving is getting too difficult; we're going to take a job doing something else." Some of them have been doing this for a number of years; some are relatively new to it. But it's what they are doing because they have to do it to earn that kind of money to support their families. If they had other opportunities, I'm sure some of them would investigate them.

They tell me about the time it takes to pick up the fare, get them out to the airport—and, Mr. Speaker, you know what traffic can be like in this city. Then you're there and you've got to drive all the way back in the same traffic or maybe worse, depending upon the time of day, back to the city of Toronto, making absolutely nothing for that return trip, but your expenses are still there. We all know what it was like with gas prices after the hurricanes hit in the southern United States. That trip from the airport to downtown Toronto got a lot more expensive during those weeks. Thankfully, gas prices have receded somewhat.

They're not yet back to the levels they were at previously, but they are approaching that. We're thankful for that, and I'm sure that each and every one of those operators is thankful for that. However, they recognize the costs involved. Now they're going to be facing serious monetary fines if they pick up a fare at the airport.

The wrong side of it is that the limousine drivers and—listen: As my friend from Trinity–Spadina said, "God bless them." None of them is in an easy job, but they have a significant advantage. They all work long hours and difficult hours and sometimes have to put up with difficult people in those cabs. But they have the advantage of taking a fare from the airport to downtown and, on many occasions—in fact, most occasions—being able to take one back. They do have arrangements with many of the hotels that allow them to pick up that fare. I know there are restrictions that you've got to have an agreement, that you've got a prearranged deal that you're picking a fare up. That is easy to get around. It's like a lot of the other provisions in this bill. They're very important, but you've got to be able to enforce them. You've got to have the resources to enforce them.

That is, in a nutshell, the crux of the unfairness of section 4. If there was a commitment that that section would not be proclaimed, this bill would have the unanimous support of the House; I'm absolutely certain of it. There are still so many good things in this bill. I do give the government credit for bringing forward the legislation, but it was legislation that was basically, other than that provision that is going to change the world for taxi drivers in the city of Toronto and change their ability and terribly injure and harm their ability, infringe on their ability to make a living—other than that section, most of this bill was proposed by the previous government. So if we were to take that section out of the bill, we wouldn't have a problem with it at all. There would be no such issue as having this debate. But as my friend from Lanark–Carleton says, this is a matter of significant and grave principle; we must articulate our displeasure and our disagreement with this section of the bill, because it is wrong. It is categorically wrong.

I'll tell you those taxi drivers also say. I understand that they are very, very busy, but they have told me that they are going to do what they can to extract a payment from this government for the wrongness that they are committing against them. So we will see, after this bill is passed—and it will be passed; we know that. The government House leader is going on about what he considers a lack of co-operation in the House. I guess he would be happy if we were just to shut down debate and stifle opposition to all government measures and let them have the day on everything. The fact is, they will have the day. They've got a significant and powerful majority in this chamber. But it is not only our privilege, it is our responsibility to speak out when we are absolutely convinced that there is a bill or a portion of said bill where we must, in the strongest terms possible, indicate

our displeasure, and that is what we're doing with regard to Bill 169.

I want to talk about some of the good things in this bill. Doubling the speeding fines in construction zones: Again, this is something that was proposed in a bill brought forth by the previous government. My friend from Oak Ridges and my friend across the way from Chatham-Kent Essex spoke about it. It is vital that we protect those men and women who are working in the construction industry to rebuild our vital highways. We must ensure that their safety is paramount when we're doing rehabilitative work on any of those highways. To protect those individuals, with this measure—if people are aware, and they will be aware—there will be a significant price to pay if you break the rules.

However, again, if we're going to bring in these measures, what are we going to do to ensure that we have the ability to enforce these provisions of this law? It is easy to pass laws when you have a government with 70 sitting members. It is not so easy to enforce the law if you don't give those people to whom you've given the charge to enforce that law the resources to do exactly that. As they say, "Show me the money." If the government is not going to ensure that the resources are there for those people who are entrusted and charged with enforcing that law, then the law will be meaningless. It will make for good politics, it will sell well—we have this law in place, and you can rest assured that this government will be out there telling everybody, "We passed this law to protect construction workers"—but if you don't have the resources to enforce that law, you have done nothing. It's like the parents who set all kinds of rules within the home—curfews and guidelines and whatever—and prescribe the punishments that will be meted out if those rules aren't followed, but if you cannot follow through on those, it's not long before the children realize you're a paper tiger, a toothless tiger, and nobody pays attention to your ranting or raving any more. So that's the concern about this government. They don't seem to be willing to put the resources where they're needed.

For example, look at the crime situation in this city. I understand that there were two more killings in the city today. The Attorney General—lots of this. He's starting to change his tune a little bit with regard to what he might propose to do to affect the terrible state of the situation here in the city, but if you go back only a few months, his position and that of the Premier was quite different. They were all subscribing to the group-hug theory, hoping that that would take care of everything. Now they seem to be getting the message that if you're going to have any effect on crime, you've got to be prepared to deal with the criminals who perpetrate the crime.

2000

Enforce high-occupancy vehicle lanes to encourage carpooling and transit use: You know, when you drive down the 401—I don't know what the count is, I haven't done a survey, but as you're meeting or you're passing

vehicles or, more likely, being passed by vehicles, it's amazing the number of vehicles—if you were to count 25 vehicles and see how many vehicles have a single occupant, the driver alone. So that kind of initiative, again proposed by the previous government—this government is very good at stealing good ideas. There's no question about that.

I'm not suggesting they're thieves. I wouldn't want to say anything unparliamentary, because I got chastised very quickly today when our government House leader thought that I might have said something unparliamentary, but I'm not sure. He was probably buried in the Bob Rae book at the time and he wasn't really listening.

Mr. Marchese: He likes Bob Rae.

Mr. Yakabuski: Oh, yeah, he loves Bob Rae. I think that's the only book he's got. It's the only book I ever hear him quoting.

Mr. Marchese: He's always reading that book.

Mr. Yakabuski: Always reading that book, Rosie.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, look at that, Labour of Love. God bless.

Mr. Yakabuski: Anyway, where was I? Oh, yes, the vehicle lanes. So if there's something that we can do to increase—not increase; that's a bad way of putting it. If we can—

Mr. Marchese: Increase the number of passengers.

Mr. Yakabuski: Yes. If we can be more efficient in the way we move people on highways—highways are not just about moving vehicles; we understand we have commerce and trade—but they're about moving people. Vehicles are there to move people and highways move vehicles. They should have people in them, of course. You know where I'm getting to, Rosie.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, absolutely. I have a clear idea.

Mr. Yakabuski: So if we can increase that capacity by way of being more efficient in the way we move people, that would be certainly—

Mr. Marchese: That's an environmentally good idea.

Mr. Yakabuski: Absolutely. There's nothing we can say wrong about it in simple terms.

There are a number of things. Studded tires in the north: They've been calling for that for years.

New offences for flying vehicle parts and improving inspection standards: We need to do everything we can to ensure that the huge commercial vehicles on roads are held to the highest standards possible, because when something happens with one of those big rigs, that's a very dangerous situation. It's not like a smart car going out of control. So we've certainly got to do everything we can in that respect.

We're on transportation—

Mr. Marchese: You have no problem with that; right?

Mr. Yakabuski: No, no problem whatsoever. It's section 4. We're on the same page. Me and my paisano here are on the same page.

I want to talk for a moment about the transportation issue in general, and that is the four-laning of Highway 17. My colleague from Lanark-Carleton has worked extremely hard and has convinced the government that

Highway 7 from Carleton Place up to the 417 should be four-laned.

So, with that having been accomplished by my colleague, the next logical piece of highway in this province that should be four-laned is Highway 17 from Arnprior west. This is a TransCanada highway. It is absolutely without a doubt the next logical expansion of the 400 system. I would urge this minister to move as quickly as possible. This bill is about safety. This bill is all about safety. Bill 169—the minister will jump up and down. He even jumped up and down with the taxicab drivers and the airport limo drivers here at the \$200,000 event. They were really buddies there. But I want him to jump up and down about four-laning Highway 17 from Arnprior west, because of the safety issues involved and also because of the commercial enhancements to a riding like mine, Renfrew county, which is very economically depressed, and would certainly be assisted tremendously if we had an efficient transportation route.

But again, I want to point out that this is a Trans-Canada Highway. When people from other countries come to Canada and they get on a TransCanada Highway, they expect to see something that would be considered an excellent highway. I tell you, that's not the case when you have to go two-laning from Arnprior west, and at certain times of day and on the weekends, the traffic volume is absolutely horrendous. That's something that has to happen immediately, the extension of that four-laning.

Again, I say there are some good things in this bill—no question about it—but you've got to treat human beings fairly, and the taxis in Toronto are not being treated fairly by this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: People should know that Tories and New Democrats rarely agree with each other; it's a fact. So when we do, it says something.

We were in the same hearing, and I heard two things: One, during the committee hearings we heard from the fire chiefs of Ontario. They told us the firefighters are increasingly responding to motor vehicle accidents. The chiefs felt that because firefighters are often the first to respond to an accident scene, having legal authorization for traffic control duties would help ensure safety and control at accident scenes as well as the safety of firefighters. In many situations, firefighters are already directing traffic when asked to be police officers.

We moved an amendment as New Democrats, and the Liberals supported it, authorizing those who work for the fire department to behave as police in directing traffic, without which there would be some legal liability, and many of them might not respond to an accident if and when needed. We moved an amendment, the Liberals thought it was a good idea, and they passed it.

The only other people we heard from were Toronto taxi drivers, who feel they are unfairly treated by this bill. In this respect, Tories and New Democrats heard that message; Liberals refused to listen and refused to respond. It wouldn't take much to give some fairness to

Toronto taxi drivers. "It could easily be delayed and dealt with in the City of Toronto Act that they're about to pass next month," they argue. We urge and plead with them to listen to what the Toronto taxi drivers said and make that change so we can support the rest of the bill that is good.

Mr. Hoy: I'm pleased to rise and address some of the important parts of this legislation. The driving habits of people on our highways is a concern among many, and we need to instill upon people that they have to abide by the rules. Apparently, there are those who deem that they must be speeding, for example, as I mentioned some time ago, through construction zones. They don't heed that call. They wouldn't speed through some other person's work zone, but they seem to think that they can do this in construction zones, and it's very dangerous. We've had deaths and injuries.

I've talked to construction workers who, as they work beside the highways of this province—both urban and rural, small roads, large roads, 400-series highways—have had whatever they were working with, perhaps a shovel, a rake, some such tool, taken right out of their hand. That's how close the autos, the vehicles, are coming to them. It's very dangerous. They are taking things literally right out of their hands. We must watch for that. I think it's important that this bill doubles the fines in construction zones to bring about an awareness, and stiffen up the conviction mechanism when that does occur.

And, of course, we're talking about pedestrian crosswalks, allowing police to investigate and clean up accidents quicker. The police endorse this as well. Enforcing high-occupancy vehicle lanes, encouraging carpooling and transit use are not only good for the GTA and Toronto but other cities and metropolitan areas around the province as well.

2010

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add some comments on the speech of the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke this evening. Frankly, I was a little surprised to hear that he's in favour of doubling fines for speeding tickets in construction zones, knowing his past record for speed observance. I guess he's looking out for the greater good of the rest of us; however, I do have some concerns for him.

As many members have said, we're in favour of most of the parts of this bill. One of the things it would do is allow for the establishment of high-occupancy lanes to allow for more people to be transported more efficiently.

The part that we have a problem with in this bill, as has been mentioned, is section 4. Section 4 deals with taxis and limos, where the limo drivers can pick up at Pearson airport and come into Toronto and then pick up again and return with a full load. If you wanted to transport people more efficiently, you'd have the taxicabs going from Toronto to the airport with a full load and then returning with a full load. Otherwise, you'll have empty cars coming back, more pollution, more gridlock. In this legislation, in section 4, those taxicabs are subject to a fine up to \$20,000, if you can believe that.

The government House leader was complaining about debating this legislation this evening. We've made it very clear that we have a problem with section 4. We've been debating this in a very civil manner. Mr. Tory, our leader, is bringing to this place a more civil type of atmosphere. However, we have a problem with section 4, and we would like you to not proclaim it, or remove it from the bill, and then this bill will pass very quickly.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I listened with great interest to the member for Oak Ridges, who was a transportation minister at one time, and he extolled the virtues of the bill. He did have some concerns about certain parts of the bill. He indicated that he was voting for it, just as the Conservative caucus voted for this bill on second reading. That's why I'm mystified by the fact that this bill is being dragged out in terms of the debate. There was very extensive debate at second reading, and I encouraged members to do so. I was glad to hear them make their points. People have done so and I commend them for it.

However, I did listen to the leader of the official opposition, the new, supposedly fresh, leader of the Conservative Party in Ontario, who was going to change things in this Legislature in terms of the way that it operates. I know he has expressed concern that this place isn't run as a corporate boardroom is; in other words, his experience is that it moves quickly and so on, and I understand that. But he has also expressed a concern about the Legislature itself. I don't think he's interested in going into past history the way my friend from Lanark-Carleton was predisposed to do, because you can't have it both ways. You can't say, "The leader of the official opposition, John Tory, is this new person with a new approach," and then play the same old tricks that have been played for years and years. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to say, "We're going to do things the same old way," that's fine, I accept that. But he can't say, "We're going to do things a brand new way," and then turn around and have his members unnecessarily drag out debate on the third reading of a piece of legislation before this House.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'd like to thank the members for Trinity-Spadina, Chatham-Kent Essex, Parry Sound-Muskoka, and the Minister of Tourism and government House leader, the member from St. Catharines.

I'm kind of disappointed that the member for St. Catharines noted that he listened with great interest to the speech by my colleague from Oak Ridges, which clearly indicates that he listened with very little interest to my speech. So I'm somewhat hurt by that, but I will get over it.

What I might not get over and what the taxi drivers in Toronto might not get over is section 4 in this bill. The member for Chatham-Kent liked to talk about what we agreed with. He liked to talk about the speeding fines in construction zones. But what they're not talking about—and the member from St. Catharines, the government House leader, wants to talk about some idea he's got

about John Tory not doing what he said he was going to do or whatever. But what about the taxi drivers in the city of Toronto? What they're not going to get over is the absolute unconscionable damage that you are perpetrating on them if you proclaim section 4 in this bill.

It looks like the member for Chatham-Kent is going to be the designated speaker. You know, you have a designated hitter in baseball; tonight he's going to be the designated hitter. He's doing the two-minute hits. I would like you to respond to those taxi drivers. I would like you to tell those people that you don't care what happens to them, because that is what you've told them with this section of this bill: a pay-off to the limousine operators for attending the \$200,000 event on behalf—

Mr. Levac: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think if you heard what I heard, you would probably assume that it was a little inappropriate.

The Acting Speaker: I think the member should withdraw the word.

Mr. Yakabuski: Am I going to lose my time to finish?

The Acting Speaker: I'll give you 10 seconds.

Mr. Yakabuski: Because otherwise I'm out of time, but within the time I will withdraw, and if I could just wrap up, I think I've got about a minute left.

The Acting Speaker: Ten seconds.

Mr. Yakabuski: Mr. Speaker, that was a bad choice of words, but something was fishy in Denmark with that deal.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to take part in the debate on Bill 169. I understand it's now the third day of debate on third reading of An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and to amend and repeal various other statutes in respect of transportation-related matters. I understand we are down to 10-minute rotations now, according to the Clerk's desk, so I want to put a few points on the record tonight.

We'll get to the taxicab/limousine issue in a couple of minutes, but first of all I want to congratulate at least three Ministers of Transportation—Mr. Takhar, Mr. Klees and of course Mr. Sterling—for their input on this bill, because we've come a long way. As Mr. Marchese mentioned, I think it's clear that we would really like to support this bill, except for this one problem with section 4, the licensing of the taxis and the airport limousines.

The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex brought up the concern about the doubling of fees in construction zones. Nobody would be opposed to that. I can't imagine anyone who would be disappointed in seeing that. We've seen lives lost in the construction area because of people who don't take enough caution around construction sites. We need to know that people who are building and maintaining our highways are well protected by our laws, the same as in our accident zones or policing zones where emergency vehicles are pulled over—exactly the same in those areas as well. We need to know and the general public needs to know that you can be severely penalized for speeding in those particular areas. For

things like that, there's no question that we would be very, very supportive of that, because of course it is a public safety issue.

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Another thing that I personally am in favour of, and I would like to put a couple of comments on the record, are the high-occupancy vehicle lanes. There's one thing I would like to see the government do on the high-occupancy vehicle lanes. I was at estimates a couple of weeks ago and I asked the Minister of Transportation and the staff who accompanied the minister—there were probably 12 or 14 people in the room at the time—how many people would be the minimum in a car in an HOV lane. I'm told that the ministry is going to start out with two people. I find that problematic, because I have travelled on HOV lanes in the United States, in Washington and areas like that, Baltimore a few times, and I know that the minimum is four passengers per vehicle. So if you carpool and four people are in the vehicle, you can use that HOV lane. My understanding from the ministry is that it's going to be two people per vehicle. I think we're missing a real opportunity there, because I think with carpooling and going to the expense of putting in these lanes, there will likely be not only a lot of media attention around it, but there will be a lot of propaganda around it. I would like to see the government and the Ministry of Transportation reconsider that. I think we should start out now with four passengers per vehicle, and then they would be eligible to use that HOV lane.

I know that it's very successful in some of the states in the United States. I particularly remember Washington, where all kinds of people carpooled with minivans and cube vans, those types of things, and they'd get eight, 10, 12 people per vehicle. It will take a lot of cars off the road as we carpool. So that is one area that I would hope that the ministry would very quickly reconsider.

At the estimates committee they gave me a report back saying that, no, it would be just two. But I think it's an area where, if we're going to pass important legislation like this, and we're trying to get rid of gridlock, it's a real opportunity to pull a lot more cars off the road so that the people who are using those lanes would feel more comfortable.

I also want to say that I agree with a lot of the comments made by the members of the third party and my colleagues here this evening when it comes to the whole idea around section 4. It just isn't fair. We as members of the opposition travel a lot in taxis in Toronto. We don't have any drivers or limousines or the fancy cars that the ministers have—

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Your leader has one.

Mr. Dunlop: Well, he's one person, OK? So if we have one vehicle—that's what we have in our caucus. But the rest of us travel by taxi, and we talk to the taxicab drivers. I've talked to the guys in some of the Co-op taxis and Beck, and the ones that come up to the doors here all the time, and I can tell you that they're extremely disappointed in the government for coming out with section 4 and for supporting the people in the limousine service. I

think they've got a good point. It does seem unfair to me. We're not talking about people who are earning huge sums of money to begin with; we're talking about people who have to rely on the busiest times of the year in the city of Toronto so that they can earn even a reasonable income. They've already had lots of problems in their industry with the high cost of fuel and just the competition in the industry itself. So to take away that right at the airports and give it to the limousine services does seem to be particularly unfair to small business operators, to small people who are trying desperately to earn a decent living in an area that is difficult to earn a living in.

I'm going to go along with my caucus members here. I will not be supporting this piece of legislation unless you withdraw section 4, or unless you do not proclaim it and we go back and do a little more debate on it. We have to refine it. But I do think that the people who were in committee, who clearly made their points known, should be listened to. There's more to it than just a fancy fundraiser where one group of people raised a lot of money for the government. In fact, when it's the Minister of Transportation, I would almost consider this to be a conflict of interest with that type of fundraiser taking place. It's just not right. It doesn't look good to the taxpayers of the province. We've already got a credibility problem with this government. I think if they wanted to save some face with this bill, if they withdrew section 4 at this point or if we would agree to not proclaim that section, then they would have basically all-party support for the remainder of the bill. I think we would all want to support that for the sake of public safety in the province of Ontario and for the sake of eliminating some gridlock here in the province as well.

With that, though, I do want to say—and I know that my colleague Mr. Yakabuski put on the record some comments he had made on the highways in his area—that I got a call today from the local TV station. It used to be called the New VR; it's now called the A-Channel. They have decided that Highway 12 between Coldwater and Orillia is the worst highway in Simcoe county. It's rough, it needs to be refurbished, and it needs to have traffic lanes. There's a public safety issue with it. There are more people living in that area, and that road needs to be updated as soon as possible.

In the estimates committee, I asked the question again to the minister. The response was that they were preparing to do it in 2006, but they wouldn't give me a firm commitment. There were maybe still a few budgetary problems surrounding it. But the contract will apparently be ready, according to MTO staff. I would urge the government to look at that highway. I said to the minister in the meeting that I'm very satisfied with all the highways in my riding—Highway 400, Highway 11, Highway 93—but I can't be happy with Highway 12. There's a public safety issue with the condition of the road and the volume of traffic that's flowing over it as well right now.

As I sum up in my 10 minutes here, I just want to say that I would urge the government once again to withdraw

section 4 or not proclaim it at this point, and I would be more than happy to support this bill and all the other sections that are there to support. With that, I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: New Democrats agree with much of what has been said by the member from Simcoe North and remind the Liberal members of the following: In late September, we had a one-day hearing. In that one-day hearing, two groups of people came: fire chiefs and Toronto taxi drivers, including the limousine folks from the GTA. The chiefs felt that because firefighters are often the first to respond to an accident scene, having legal authorization for traffic control duties would help ensure safety and control at accident scenes as well as the safety of firefighters. Without the amendment we introduced that would allow firefighters to do this, there would have been serious liabilities if and when a firefighter intervened and played the role of a policeman or policewoman. The Liberals accepted that amendment. They must have felt it was a fair thing to do. Only three or four fire chiefs of Ontario came, and on that basis the Liberals must have thought that an amendment was appropriate.

The others were the taxi drivers of Toronto. They asked themselves, "Why are anti-scooping amendments being introduced to the Highway Traffic Act and not the Municipal Act under which the taxi industry is licensed?" These anti-scooping amendments give preference to limousine drivers from the GTA over the taxi drivers of Toronto. Quite rightly, the taxi drivers of Toronto are saying, "There is an unfairness being enforced here." You are entrenching an already biased procedure that allows limousine drivers from the airport to come into Toronto and scoop drivers back to the airport, but does not permit Toronto taxi drivers to do the same. This anti-scooping amendment is going to hit Toronto taxi drivers hard. They cannot drive there. It's unfair, and we hope Liberals are listening to this.

2030

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I just wanted add something to this debate or make a couple of comments. I guess I'm somewhat surprised at the members of the opposition and the members of the third party who were in the general government committee that heard those deputations. I was there. Let me tell you, we did hear from the firefighters and, you're right, we did make an amendment, because it was the right thing to do. We heard from the taxi drivers, and the parliamentary assistant for municipal affairs, which had the lead in those committees, made a commitment from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and I'm going to read that:

"Brad Duguid, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, indicated that the ministry is in the process of reforming the Municipal Act. These reforms will address the concerns of the taxi industry in terms of an unlevel playing field. He indicated that amendments to the Transportation Statute Law alone will not fix the problem. The taxi industry

needs legislative tools to level the playing field across the province of Ontario.

"It is my understanding that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing will bring their legislation to amend the Municipal Act later on this year."

So that particular issue is going to be addressed. It was totally—

Mr. Marchese: So remove this amendment.

Mr. Rinaldi: They just weren't listening, Mr. Speaker. They're just looking for something to stall good legislation.

We heard from previous members that it's something we need to do. The Toronto taxi driver issue is going to be dealt with through another piece of legislation. It wasn't part of this structure whatsoever. Certainly we brought it forward, we listened and we made a commitment. So this is really not an issue to spend any more time on this bill. I think we should pay attention during the committee hearings.

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I want to commend my colleague from Simcoe North for his presentation on this bill. Much has been said about a delay tactic that may be at play here, and just for the record, we've got a government which is deciding rather unilaterally that this Parliament needs to sit all afternoon and all evening, four days a week. Well, that's fine; that's the right of the government to do that. But a government that also espouses that it stands for a form of democratic renewal certainly wouldn't want to stand in its place and state—as the member for St. Catharines has suggested—that somehow we're interfering with the democratic process by participating in this debate.

Even if there are members of the official opposition who agree with most of the elements of this legislation, there are controversial sections where all members have the right to speak. I don't necessarily agree with all aspects of this bill, and I don't always agree with every aspect of a specific bill among my colleagues within my own caucus. But I do believe it's our right, if we're going to be forced by the government to sit here every evening four days a week, to at least stand up and raise issues of concern. I'll be speaking later this evening. I have some concerns that have been expressed by my community, and I wonder why the minister felt it appropriate to exclude them. I know that my friend from Trinity-Spadina is quite exercised about this issue of the inequity for Toronto cab drivers, and he makes a very valid point about why this isn't dealt with as a municipal issue when we know the government is planning some legislation to give greater power to the city of Toronto. If they'd get on with bringing in legislation, we wouldn't need to debate this for three days.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I heard reference being made to the fact that the Legislature sits in the evenings. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there are discussions that go on between House leaders. In fact, there was a concern expressed by members of the opposition about sitting in the evenings, and I certainly made an attempt to accommodate them by limiting the number of sittings as much

as possible. But I want to remind the members of the House and the leader of the official opposition that only one bill has passed so far during this session, and that was a bill which was left over from the last session of the Ontario Legislature. While I understand the concerns that they may have from time to time, I note that the leader of the official opposition thinks that this House does not function appropriately. So there have been ongoing discussions which have tried to eliminate the evening House sittings, which are unpopular with some members of the opposition, who would like to be doing other things related to their jobs on this evening or perhaps even spending some quality time with people close to them. That's fine.

What I am very concerned about is that here we have a bill which the official opposition has agreed to, voted for on second reading—there were some hearings that took place, and I understand there's still a difference of view on this particular issue—that is being dragged out into the third day of debate on third reading. I know that's an inside-the-House note, and that most people out there might not know the difference, but I remember reading in Ian Urquhart's column in the Toronto Star that the leader of the official opposition wanted to do things differently. We've tried to accommodate the wishes of the opposition; we've had one bill passed and another bill that's being delayed almost indefinitely.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Dunlop: I'd like to thank the member from Northumberland, the member from Burlington and the member from St. Catharines, the government House leader, for their comments on—I guess it was on my speech, but most of it related to House leader business.

However, I just want to say that I believe in as much democratic renewal as we can probably have in this assembly, but when there is something fairly controversial like section 4, we as members of the opposition have to try to defend to the best of our ability what we consider to be inequalities within the legislation. We've been told clearly that's how this industry feels, and as a result of that, I think somebody has to defend the rights of these folks to earn a decent and proper living.

If it's going to be brought out in some other piece of legislation with the City of Toronto Act or with some other Municipal Affairs Act, so be it, but we certainly haven't been promised anything. We haven't signed anything. If it's your word of mouth that it's going to happen, we simply don't trust you. You've broken so many promises—over 60 to date—how could we possibly trust anything that you say in this House? We have to stay here, and if we're here four nights or five nights debating this bill, so be it. But we're going to be here to defend the rights of the people that are being affected under section 4.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jackson: I was waiting for one of the members of the government party to stand up, but I guess they're not going to participate in the debate this evening.

I have several issues that I'd like to raise with respect to this legislation. I made a point earlier in my comments in support of the member from Simcoe North about the process. I noticed that the member from St. Catharines raised the issue of legislation carried over that he passed, and that was the famous adoption bill, which fell into disrepute about the third day after it was tabled and had a very bumpy ride through one set of public hearings. Subsequent extension tried to turn the dial and change the public's focus on that legislation, but ultimately, it still lacked any support from any legal circle anywhere in Canada or any of the privacy commissioners.

So when the government House leader rises in his place to talk about it being the only piece of legislation that he seems to have passed in the time we've been back, I want to remind him that it should never have been passed, and he had all sorts of other legislation that they could have brought forward as a priority, including this one for that matter, because there are some key elements in it.

There have been some issues that have not been raised in this debate. This legislation, in section 128, will allow municipalities to pass an increased number of bylaws that will allow them to reduce the speed limit to 30 kilometres per hour. This has become a very clever opportunity for some municipalities to strategically place a rather abrupt adjustment in the speed rate in some of the most unlikely locations, which ultimately become high-yield locations for the municipal police forces to hand out tickets. To cite an example, those people from the Hamilton-Halton area will know that if you're travelling along Plains Road, travelling on the old Queen Elizabeth Highway, with the botanical gardens on both sides, the speed limit is 60, and all of a sudden—the only property around this location is a graveyard and passive space overlooking Hamilton harbour—the speed limit drops by 20 miles per hour. The police simply hide behind a couple of headstones in the graveyard, and on any given day you'll drive by there and they will have eight or nine cars lined up, each paying this fine, because of the poorly marked signage in that location. Members of the public need to know that this will allow municipalities to employ this clever tactic in an increased number of locations. Now, that's not to say that reducing speed limits is necessarily a bad thing. When it's applied inappropriately, I think it's questionable.

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Our government brought in safe school zones and caused reductions. To again cite a local example, on New Street in the city of Burlington, where we have three elementary schools and three high schools, five pedestrians were killed on that one stretch of road over about an eight- or nine-year period. So I lobbied long and hard for the Ministry of Transportation to bring in, with the support of municipalities, fluctuating speed limits at the time when students are in school or coming to and from school. I think that is an appropriate application. But to give municipalities that kind of authority simply lends itself to some of the potential abuse I referred to,

which, in my view, is what's going on in the city of Hamilton.

This legislation goes on with a new section that, "allows for the use of variable speed limits on designated highways or parts of highways. The ministry may set differential speed limits to apply at different times" of the day "to different highways or parts of highways and to different lanes." Now, these are rather new innovations for the province of Ontario and something that our drivers are going to have a hard time adjusting to. I'd kind of like to know in advance if the minister is thinking of three demerit points if you are 10 miles per hour over on a lane that has its speed limit adjusted at certain times of the day. This is part of the debate that we didn't have in this process, nor did we get the ministry to adequately explain that.

We have a new section that designates any lane as a high-occupancy vehicle lane and limits the use of that lane to prescribed classes or types of vehicles. Well, if it's for the purposes of making sure emergency vehicles can go through there, that's fine, or buses, in order to assist in rapid transit. But if it's unduly restrictive, then you're taking already cramped and congested and gridlocked highways and compounding it even more.

Now, are we responding here to the problem of gridlock? Are we treating the symptoms, or are we contributing to the problem by entering into these kind of programs? These have never been done in Ontario and we need to make sure that consumers are willing to participate in this. Also, as in all cases, we must ensure that the regulations don't impose such severe fines that Ontarians lose their licences with a high degree of regularity because that's the nature of the penalty under the Highway Traffic Act.

There is this whole section doing what Liberals are notorious for, and that is setting fees and increasing costs associated with doing business with your own government. They have had an abysmal record in the last two years of taking fees and increasing them. Here we have a section in this legislation that allows for the fact that the ministry may ask a person to show cause why that person's "licence should not be cancelled, suspended or changed in respect of its class," and that an Ontario taxpayer "may be required to attend an interview or group session with a ministry official or provide written information to the ministry, or both. The minister is authorized to set" new "fees for the interviews, group sessions or submission of written information."

We do not have any indication from the government about what these costs could be. I noticed that when the government was desperately attempting to reposition itself and its image with its throne speech earlier this fall, it talked about looking at something like birth certificates, which had clearly been a challenge for this government to manage properly, and that they're offering it free after a certain period. Taking one such program to marquee to present to the public can sometimes mask over the adding of additional red tape and a myriad of new fees and charges that may, as is suggested in this

legislation, lead to further suspensions of people's driver's licences.

There are many, many sections for this new legislation. There is a whole series of issues dealing with school crossings, with school busing. These are all very positive amendments. Quite frankly, any omnibus bill of this magnitude, this nature, is bound to have some very excellent things in it. Even some of the government members have admitted that these are ideas that the public has been asking for that previous ministers have worked on, so I'm pleased to see some of those elements.

The Minister of Labour was asking earlier what my constituent Carolyn Forbes was making an inquiry about. Essentially, she was making an inquiry to the ministry regarding the status of MTO's authority based on private land and public land. The response from the ministry was, "You hire a lawyer, you go to court, and you work it out within the court system and let the courts decide that question." We found that quite unacceptable, that the lawyers in the Ministry of Transportation couldn't give us a straight answer.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: The member from Burlington raised some good questions, and if the government had not introduced these anti-scooping amendments in this bill but, rather, had dealt with it through the Municipal Act, we would have spent more time debating some of the questions the member from Burlington raised. But what has happened is that because of this anti-scooping amendment that favours limousine drivers in the GTA, we were forced to listen to numerous taxi drivers from Toronto who wanted to make their case and be heard. They got attention from New Democrats; they got attention from the Tories.

It's unfortunate. The government could have taken that out, but they didn't. The Minister of Tourism today is very composed, very passive, very pacified. It's interesting. I've never seen him so calm. It reminds me of some former ministers of the Conservative government—so controlled. But he fails to listen to some of the concerns the taxi drivers have raised. He doesn't even talk about it, as if he's oblivious to it, although the member from Northumberland was there. He's utterly disingenuous when he makes the comment that his parliamentary assistant, Mr. Duguid, from Scarborough somewhere, came for a little bit and then left, but at no time did he say, "I am committed to reviewing this on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs." At no time did he ever do that. He left in a hurry, and left it to the others who are clearly anti-Toronto-taxi-driver. They supported this amendment that is clearly biased toward the limousines coming from the airport. It was very clear—it was clear in the statements they made, clear in the questions I was asking and clear in the questions they were asking—which side they were on.

The member from Northumberland is disingenuous, and so are his other Liberal caucus members in this regard.

2050

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have been listening intently to the debate on Bill 169. We have an old saying in Peterborough. It's called, "Re-sawing sawdust," and that's exactly what's been going on here. When I think of such key things as the school safety zones and lowering speeds in construction zones—my friend, the member from Chatham-Kent Essex has been talking about this for years. He was absolutely right when he brought it forward in his private member's bills. It has been incorporated here, and I think it's time to quit re-sawing sawdust and pass this bill.

Mr. O'Toole: Clearly, the member from Oak Ridges, Frank Klees, and Norm Sterling, the member from Lanark-Carleton, introduced Bill 241, which is substantively the same as this bill. All we're really saying—and the two prior ministers have done considerable consultations—and what John Tory is trying to say is that we have heard during the public hearings on Bill 169 that there's this section, section 4, that David Miller would like to see moved into the Municipal Act or the City of Toronto Act. The member from Trinity-Spadina would like the same thing.

In the spirit of democratic renewal, I would suggest that the government House leader and Minister of Tourism could, in his role as a senior minister here tonight, do the honourable thing, take the right step forward, try to reach consensus and end this needless debate, because we substantively agree with most of the bill.

I have the greatest respect for the minister, and know that he has the respect of the members here—that we would respond and this debate could be ended and this bill would become law, and we could start moving on to more important things for the province of Ontario.

There are a number of important initiatives in this bill that we are supportive of: The transportation critic incident management, for instance, is a case where we want to see the congestion and gridlock resolved as part of managing the incidents on our public highways. Encouraging public transit and the right of transit to intervene in traffic management and allowing them to change signals to ensure that they don't hold up traffic—that's a good thing.

You'll find agreement on most sections of this bill that deal with keeping our highways moving, keeping the economy moving and making Ontario a safe place to drive. But this is a small request: to look at section 4 and deal with it later. Don't proclaim it as law. If we had that in writing tonight, I could put it to you that John Tory and the opposition will support this bill.

Mr. Levac: Just a short comment on what we've been hearing. Since 2000, myself, Mr. Hoy, Mr. Bartolucci and a few other members, when we were in opposition, offered several different pieces of legislation for improvements to our Highway Traffic Act, and at that time, as was mentioned by somebody else on the other side, they actually had three years to deal with some of those issues, and we were told, "We couldn't do anything about it because we held an election in 2003." It's unfortunate

that we have to go back and forth about who said what, who did what, who's doing what.

I think what we really want to do is get on with getting these kids safe in the school zones; we want to make sure that construction workers are protected; we want to make sure that the goodness that this bill is going to be bringing to the people and to the safety of the people of the province of Ontario is adhered to. Quite frankly, at the end of the day, we're going to get a piece of legislation that's going to offer from everybody's mouth, including the previous government of the NDP, that we're looking for safety issues that are going to protect the people.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Burlington has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Jackson: There are several other sections in this legislation—I didn't mention the one about the construction zone. I recall, with reference to the QEW and an overpass at Walker's Line, that I convened a meeting with MTO staff to talk to local business people about the impact of this interchange. The senior supervisor who attended was extraordinarily helpful. We worked on ways we could make amendments to the configuration of the overpass, and access for local businesses. Two days later he was struck by a car and killed. I very much support that element in the legislation. It is a very true risk out there, not only for those in construction but also for MTO supervisory staff who find themselves on our highways in their line of public service.

I only had 10 minutes to comment. I had lots more I wanted to speak to, on the record. Again, issues that are not coming up in this debate: There is a subsection 9(1.1), which increases the penalty for an offence under the Highway Traffic Act from \$100 to not more than \$500. It is now \$5,000 under this legislation. We've got another one that now moves from a maximum of \$500 to \$50,000, and we've got another one that goes from \$60 to \$150.

It is always of concern that the government sees this as an opportunity to increase revenues. Again, the public has not participated in this debate fully, and that's truly unfortunate, but they do rely on us in Parliament to raise the issues on their behalf.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Sterling: This is a bill which probably had its genesis back in the time when I was the Minister of Transportation, around 2001. We saw the need for legislation dealing with the construction zones, dealing with allowing municipalities to drop their speed limits, primarily because instead of municipalities using speed limits to control traffic, they were instituting speed bumps, and these islands that would appear out of nowhere on residential streets in order to cut down the speed of cars going down residential streets. Those particular hazards—the bumps and the islands, etc.—were real problems to emergency vehicles. In other words, it's OK as long as you're trying to slow the cars down, but if a fire engine is going up or an ambulance is on its way to the hospital, you want to allow those

particular vehicles to get from one place to the other as quickly as possible.

Now, we did actually—and I did as the Minister of Transportation—deal with this issue with regard to the scooper law when I was the minister. I rejected it at the time for a number of reasons. One of the reasons was this: It was traditionally in the hands of the municipalities to license taxicabs, limousines and those kinds of things, and I found it difficult to actually figure out why the Legislature should be involved in making it a provincial offence to break a municipal licensing regime. In other words, if the municipality is going to license these particular areas, then they should be responsible for creating the bylaws when somebody breaks those bylaws, and they should have bylaw enforcers there to enforce those bylaws—if they make a bylaw that says there's a fine if you break that bylaw.

I found it difficult to figure out exactly how the province would enforce this particular “scooper-duper” law at the Toronto Internal Airport. Are we going to send provincial police out to roam up and down the arrival area of the Toronto Pearson International Airport to find out if scoopers are or are not picking up people? To me, that would be a tremendous waste of very highly paid, specialized people to undertake what I thought was a municipal bylaw situation.

2100

The other odd part of the situation we have here at the Toronto Pearson International Airport is that of course the city of Mississauga receives all of the grants from the federal government, or now from the Greater Toronto Airport Authority, and presumably they don't have the problem of enforcing this particular law we are putting forth here.

I have a great deal of problem with taxi licensing and limousine licensing and that kind of thing, because it seems that over the years the people who have benefited most from the licensing regime are not the drivers working the system; it's some other people who have purchased this monopoly or this right of monopoly for—I know a few years ago these licences were selling for \$100,000 each in order to rent the licence to someone to drive around in the city of Toronto. The poor driver who is trying to make a living, put bread on the table, would have to pay somebody \$40, \$50 a day to rent the licence. I thought, and I still think, that the system is rotten, because it's not generating any help for the taxi driver who is providing the service. At any rate, we have looked at this particular bill and have found that it is unfair to one group of people providing this service.

Now, I say to the government House leader—and I say this at some risk, because the government House leader can stand in his place, be the next speaker up, because it's in his rotation, and he can say to you, Mr. Speaker, “I move”—and I'm not moving it; I'm just telling what you he can say. He can say, “Mr. Speaker, I move that you now put the question.” That kind of motion is non-debatable, and the Speaker then would have to decide whether or not this debate should continue. If they

believe we've had enough debate and that this debate should end, then usually after seven or eight hours—and we've had eight or nine hours in this Legislature—any member of the Liberal caucus can stand up.

Mr. Marchese: You're saying they're not powerless.

Mr. Sterling: They're not powerless at all. They can stand up and in one sentence end this debate. You can end this debate tonight; you can end this debate—you can't do it in the two-minute response, so it will take about eight minutes before you can have the floor again, but you can end this debate now. So don't cry to us that we're dragging this thing out, because you have the rules to move closure. You can move closure right now. We're saying you shouldn't move closure, because we still have speakers here who want to speak on this, who feel very, very aggrieved about what you're doing to the taxicab drivers of Toronto. But you have the rules in place, and the Speaker would probably rule in your favour at this time because of the length of time this debate has gone on. So let's not hear about our dragging this debate out and your having no remedy. You have a remedy. You have it right in your pocket. If you wanted to end this debate 10 minutes from now, you probably have the power to do that.

I appreciate that we are going to have the opportunity to continue debating this. The odd part of this story is that most of this bill, save and except section 4, would have been brought into legislation two, three or four years ago save for the obstreperous, obstructionist Liberal opposition of the day. Even without section 4, and every member of this Legislature agreeing to it, you are forcing us to have five days of debate on a piece of legislation like this. And you talk about us being obstructionist, with section 4 in? Give us a break. I wouldn't have put section 4 in except to expect a down and right dirty fight, because it's talking about the bread of many people of this particular city and of this province.

Most of the bill is of my and Mr. Klees's making, with regard to all of this. The government can have this bill, either with or without section 4, as I mentioned, with regard to the rules of this Legislature. We hope that sanity will prevail, and that they will, even at this late date, discharge this bill and go back to the committee of the whole House. I guarantee that in five minutes in committee of the whole House, all our members would agree to yank out section 4 and we could pass the rest of the bill unanimously tonight—you wouldn't even need a division—and we could all go home very happy.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: I agree with the member from Lanark–Carlton. I say with him and to the Liberals that they deliberately introduced this anti-scooping amendment in this Highway Traffic Act which unfairly, perhaps deliberately, has the intention of focusing all our energies on the taxi drivers of Toronto, who feel discriminated against because of this amendment. We could have talked about many other things contained in this bill, but they continue to force us, to the last moment, to talk about the

taxi drivers of Toronto because the Liberals are refusing to listen.

The member from Northumberland speaks about the fact that the member from Scarborough Centre made a commitment, he argues, that they want a level playing field. Not so. There was no such commitment. The taxi drivers of Toronto said, "Remove this amendment from the Highway Traffic Act and bring it for discussion in the Municipal Act as a way of levelling the playing field." They didn't argue, as the member from Northumberland did, that, "We want this amendment in the Highway Traffic Act and then we'll deal with fairness if and when it gets to any amendment in the Municipal Act."

This is not about fairness; this is deliberate. This is one-sided support for the limousine drivers of the airport and the GTA against the Toronto taxi drivers, clear and simple. So whenever you hear some member say, as the member from Northumberland did, that somehow they have a commitment to bring about fairness and a level playing field, there is no such commitment. The way to achieve it is to remove this amendment and then deal with that in the Municipal Act that you want to bring next month. That's the way to do it; there's no other way.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, I think it's time to move on with it. I'll be sharing my time here with the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. It's about—

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments: Do you have a question and comment?

Mr. Fonseca: Yes.

The Acting Speaker: You can't share that time. Go ahead.

Mr. Fonseca: What I would like to share, Mr. Speaker, is that we've got so much gridlock on our streets, and we've got to deal with this. High-occupancy-vehicle lanes, making sure we can get more commuters in those lanes, making sure we can reduce that gridlock and get a lot of that pollution out of our air, making sure we can make our roads and construction zones more safe—this is what Bill 169 is all about. It is about bettering our transportation system, bettering our roads.

All I can say is, it is time to move on. It is time to get the people of Ontario moving, and this bill will help in doing that. It will help in making our transportation system that much better. All I can say is, I am in full support of this bill. It's time to move on. People want to get moving.

2110

Mr. O'Toole: Government members aren't listening, because as the member from Lanark-Carleton mentioned, we are in general support of this bill, with the exception of one small section—section 4. In fact, our former minister, Frank Klees, moved an amendment to section 4. This amendment proposed that the relevant section of the act not be proclaimed until the issue is dealt with either under the Municipal Act or the City of Toronto Act. When that amendment was put before the committee, Mr. Duguid from Scarborough Centre mentioned in a very

indirect way that they were supportive of that. It appears now that there is no one over there willing to call this motion. At the end of the day, the government is trying to terminate the democratic right of members to express their views. Mr. Sterling has mentioned—he's an expert, a lawyer, an engineer, and he knows full well the rules here—what is permissible, and you can do a motion right now to end the debate.

I think what's important here is the government's unwillingness to give time or even thought to the first initiative that would illustrate or demonstrate real willingness for democratic renewal. That's what is more disappointing here than the substance. We understand that you will ram this through without even listening to us. It's been said relentlessly by the member from Trinity-Spadina that you're simply not listening. I can just repeat for the record that under section 4 of the bill, section 39(1) of the act, a driver of a motor vehicle other than a bus is not to pick up a person, but here's the real kicker: This is about people's livelihoods; it's about the families of Ontario who make their living from providing this taxi or limousine service. Do you know what they have in this section here? Under subsection (8) it says "Every person who contravenes subsection (1), (2), (3), (4) ... is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine" of up to \$20,000. Think of the family you're putting out of work, taking food from the children's mouths.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): This bill is for the safety of visitors and travellers. Let me tell you, last night I went through the experience at the airport at 10:45. The scooping organization was standing there, and I went to every traveller there and told them it was illegal. They came to me twice. I said, "Don't take him. He hasn't got a licence. There is no insurance." Finally he got a passenger who was coming in from Vancouver.

We are here for the safety of all the people coming into Ontario, not only in Toronto but in Ottawa and all over Ontario. This is why I'm saying that this bill has to pass. As a former Minister of Transportation, the gentleman from Lanark-Carleton should know this: We have the licence plates of 191 of those guys. I went back in to see if the police officers were still there. They were gone. But they were so well organized last night, and that guy was here at the public hearing, and it was proved that he was illegal. I kept telling him, "You are illegal. You are illegal." He said, "You're full of sh—." Sorry; I didn't say it. So there were about 12 or 15 people waiting in line, and I stressed, "Don't take this guy. He's illegal." He knew this, and I was yelling this to the people. I thought he was going to come back and knock me out, but he didn't because there were some security people. They have no authority to stop them.

This is why this bill is very important, not only for Toronto but for the whole of Ontario. Also, those guys are not supposed to have those cookies at the hotels in Toronto. Anybody from Toronto who wants to pick up a passenger at the airport, all he has to do is go and see the

security guard and pay \$10, as long as it is prearranged. So it is level for both sides: the limousines and the Toronto taxis.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Lanark-Carleton has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Sterling: You know, to level the playing field costs some people \$10 and some people \$200,000. It just depends on how you level a playing field. It's strange how the Liberals look at these particular matters.

We've heard various members talk about the good parts of this bill, and no one on the opposition side in this Legislature is asking the government to withdraw or change any good parts. We're in favour of it. In fact, they were our ideas.

But section 4 is the problem in this bill. It would be really good if the government could turn over a new leaf and say, "Look, we can change our mind; we can listen to the debate. We can listen to the people who were in front of the committee who were against section 4, the people who work on the streets, in the streets, who drive in the streets, who were against section 4." They said, "Look, this isn't fair to us. It discriminates against us. It's in favour of another group who are competing for our business." These people are scratching for a living, so we've got to listen to them more than we would have to listen to people who are well-heeled and do well.

Let's rip out section 4 and get on with passing this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Murdoch: It looks like I may wrap up this debate for tonight. It may be here tomorrow night, but it is past a quarter after 9 o'clock and we're still here debating Bill 169, a bill that mostly everybody likes. I don't think there's the odd person here who doesn't like it, other than this section 4. I mean, who would be against more fines and the different speed limits?

I personally had a good friend who was killed some time ago, Ken Weller, working for the MTO. He was working with people who paint the lines on highways, and someone sped by and he was killed. We're all in favour of things like that.

I want to thank my good friend from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Jean-Marc Lalonde. He, along with Gilles Bisson, from Timmins-James Bay, had the amendment in there that I'd asked for over a year ago that would help our local firefighters in rural Ontario when a road is closed. Before, they would be breaking the law by going through that road when it was closed. It happens a lot in our area, especially in the wintertime, that the snow and the winds get up and they close roads. Now all there is is a sign that says, "This road is closed." There used to be an OPP officer there, but with fewer officers, with this government in power now, it happens that there's no officer. All there is is a sign, and the lights are lit. Right now, it still would be illegal for them to go through. That was an amendment put in, and I really want to thank them again for doing so.

There are many other things, like the studs for tires in the north, all kinds of things that are in this bill. But there's a problem: We have a government that was

elected on a promise to change things. This government got elected, and their leader, the Premier, said, "We're going to have democratic renewal. We're going to listen to the backbenchers in our own party plus in the other party." I remember that. Do you remember that? They said, "Oh, we're going to change how democracy is run at Queen's Park."

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: Yeah, wait—two years ago. That was two years ago.

Now we have a bill that has a section in it that I'm sure even some members on their own side don't like. You've got unanimous disapproval of this section by the Conservatives and the NDP, but do they want to listen? No. But they want to come here and blame us for holding the House up.

As the previous speaker just said, if they would like to debate it tonight—and I'm sure we'd be willing to stay for 10 minutes to take that out. If we want to go into committee of the whole House, we would be prepared to give unanimous consent. I'm sure that if the Liberals say tonight, "We'll take that section out of the bill and have it put into the Municipal Act or the Toronto act"—whichever way they want to do it—we would be here tonight and we could pass this bill. We could get all those wonderful things in this bill passed. Can we not do that? We can do that.

2120

The member from St. Catharines, the House leader, has the power to do that if he'd like to. That would be living up to the commitment they made in the election: "We're going to change things. We're going to listen to everybody." But what's happened again is that they haven't listened to anybody else but themselves—same old, same old.

The House leader, the member from St. Catharines, said, "We don't want to go back and look at what happened." I can remember when a Liberal sat in this House all night, held this House up all night, and that gentleman became the Speaker of this House, and now he's gone on to bigger and better things. Maybe that's what you're supposed to do.

Interjection: How did he last all night?

Mr. Murdoch: We don't know how he lasted all night.

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: John O'Toole says that maybe we can get approval tonight if I don't go too hard on the Liberals. But I remember that guy—some of you weren't here; you guys were over here—sat all night, sat for two weeks, 24 hours a day. Was it two weeks or one week? It was either two weeks or one. I was here. I did my stint in here. We had to come in and stay in here; we had to stay in this House. And who was holding it up? The Liberals—and then to come in and say that we're debating this for three days, that's all, when they could end the debate tonight if they would take that section out, a section that is unparliamentary.

I wonder—I see there are members here from Ottawa and London—are we going to make the same law in Ottawa and in London? Is that going to happen? Maybe you'd like to debate about that. Maybe you'd like to stand up in your time and say, "Yes, we're only going to let the limousine drivers pick people up in Ottawa," or "Yes, we're only going to let them do it in London."

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: I hear a voice coming from that side. Maybe somebody will stand up in their time and debate this bill. They seem to have a lot to say when somebody else is speaking. Maybe that person would like to get up and tell us her thoughts.

Interjection: I'd like to know—

Mr. Murdoch: I would like to know too. Are we going to do this in Ottawa? Maybe that's the next bill they'll bring through. I'm hoping that's what they'll do. You know they want to do that.

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: Yeah, with two minutes only.

They've had time to debate this. It's been around. Obviously, they didn't feel that it was worth debating. There's a section in there that will disallow hard-working people to pick people up at the airport.

It's hard to believe that this government would do something like that when they promised, "We are going to change things. We are going to bring in new laws that would give us more parliamentary freedom in here, more freedom to vote against things." I will be surprised when this does come to a vote, if it's recorded: Will anybody over there stand up for their own people and say, "No, we don't think this is right"?

Mr. Marchese: They'll stand up for themselves.

Mr. Murdoch: Yes. We can't get them to stand up and debate. We've had to pull this debate tonight. I don't know whether there are people left on our roster, but maybe tomorrow night we'll have to do it again so that everybody has a chance to have a say in this.

You can't have it both ways. You talk about us wanting it both ways; you can't have it both ways. You've got a good bill there but for one section, and all of us over here don't agree with that. You'd think they might listen to that. They might say, "Maybe they've got something to say." But, no, "We don't want to listen to anybody else. It's our way or no way." That was the old way. I thought we were going to have a new way. I thought your leaders said in the last election, "I am going to change; I'm going to have some democratic renewal," but it never happened; unfortunately, it didn't happen.

What happened to you guys over there? Can you not force something in caucus to say, "Hey, maybe we should be listening to the other side"? You can bring this through another bill. One of your members got up and said that. I would hope, then, that he'll probably vote against this bill. Now he's shaking his head, "No." There you are already. They can't do that.

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: Now I hear somebody else over there wanting to get into the debate. We may be here later tonight now if they want to get in on this debate, because I hear him talking away over there and I'm sure he's not talking to the House leader.

Here we have a government that wants to change things. They said they wanted to do that and promised it in the election. Now we get here tonight, and we have a bill that everybody pretty well agrees with but for one section, and that could be dealt with in another bill. It could be dealt with under the Toronto act; it could be dealt with under the Municipal Act. They don't want to deal with it there; they want to ram it through here. I'm saying that as far as I'm concerned, you will get consent from me to stay here tonight, and let's do it. Let's do it tonight and get on with life. But we'll take section 4 out of it, because then you've got total support.

I don't want to hear from the government that we're holding it up. No, we're not. We're just here doing the democratic right that we have. It comes from a government that, as I said, sat here for a whole night and held us up—that same bunch—when they were in opposition. There's something wrong when they can come and say that and try to think they're doing the right thing. All we want to do is get on, get that taken out of the bill and help out the taxi drivers. Let's put it in a different bill and have another look at it, and we'll support the rest of the bill. That can be done tonight. We can sit here for a little while longer. Let's take it out. Let's go into committee of the whole, remove that section and then get on with it. We're hearing from the third party, from the NDP, that they'll go along with this too.

I know the House leader is listening intently to what I have to say. I'm sure he's maybe prepared to do this, or he'll tell us in his two-minute why he couldn't do this, and we'll get on with this. Everybody can go home happy and we can look after this other little bill, unless there's something fishy about this other one, unless there's something fishy going on with these limousine drivers. If there's something fishy going on there, then we've got a problem, haven't we, folks? If a deal has been made and some money paid, something's fishy, and I'm wondering what it is if you can't go ahead with this.

The Acting Speaker: I believe the last statement should be withdrawn.

Mr. Murdoch: Fishy?

The Acting Speaker: No, the statement that something was fishy and some money was paid.

Mr. Murdoch: That's a hard one to withdraw. With only two minutes to go, rather than you getting into any trouble, I'll withdraw it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

It being nearly 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 2127.

CONTENTS

Monday 14 November 2005

THIRD READINGS

Transportation Statute Law	
Amendment Act, 2005,	
Bill 169, <i>Mr. Takhar</i>	
Mr. Klees.....	807, 810
Mr. Marchese	809, 810, 814, 817, 820, 822, 824
Mr. Bradley	809, 814, 818, 820
Mr. Murdoch	810, 826
Mr. Levac	810, 823
Mr. Hoy.....	813, 817
Mr. O'Toole	813, 823, 825
Mr. Sterling	814, 823, 826
Mr. Yakabuski.....	814, 818
Mr. Miller.....	817
Mr. Dunlop.....	818, 821
Mr. Rinaldi	820
Mr. Jackson	820, 821, 823
Mr. Leal.....	823
Mr. Fonseca.....	825
Mr. Lalonde.....	825
Debate deemed adjourned	827

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Lundi 14 novembre 2005

TROISIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2005 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne le transport, projet de loi 169, <i>M. Takhar</i>	
M. Marchese.....	812
Débat présumé ajourné.....	827

